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TRAVELS

AND

TRAVELLERS.

85052

A Series of Sketches.

BY

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"THE BARNABYS IN AMERICA," "THE ROBERTSES,"

"THE ATTRACTIVE MAN," ETC.

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AIX-LES-BAINS.

PART II.

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By the time the boatman's story was finished, the sun was high enough to render the rowing, slow as it was, a fatiguing operation; and the old boatman reposed both his tongue and his oars for a moment or two, and then began his younger partner; he did not "take up the wondrous tale" of his companion, but, in a much more historic vein, and with evident consciousness of his own superiority, he communicated various scraps of local information. He told us that till within the last half century, the young girls of Savoy used to wear their petticoats ornamented with rows of ribbon round

the bottom, and that the number of rows indicated the amount of the portion they were to have in marriage, and the consequence was, he said, that the poor girls, if they were pretty enough, always got the best partners, because the young men, when their spirits were up, could not bear to shew themselves so pitiful as always to be looking for a rich girl to dance with, though he could not pretend to say that these financial petticoats made any essential difference as to the prejudices of the country in favour of a rich wife. Moreover, he told us, with a great deal of antiquarian dignity, that the invention of Savoy cakes, as well known in Paris, he believed, as at Aix, or Chambéry, was at least five hundred years old, for that they were first made by the cook of Amedée VI., for a banquet given to the Emperor Louis V., at Chambéry, and that these cakes were gilt, and were made to imitate the forms of the neighbouring mountains, and were offered to the noble company by the Count of Savoy himself, and his noblest barons, all on horseback, and all armed cap-à-pie.

Now all this, as we learned afterwards, was perfectly historic, and as it was accompanied with no mention whatever of ghosts, devils, or fairies, it is impossible to deny that the younger man seemed to have received a more modern education than his companion.

I was almost sorry when we reached the landing-place at Hautecombe; not exactly perhaps because I wanted more stories either from the elder or younger boatman, but because the exquisite loveliness of the scene we were quitting, and the lazy luxury in which we had enjoyed it, left no hope that we could increase our enjoyment by stepping out of our ugly-looking, but most commodious bark, in order to walk up the steep bank which leads to the abbey of Hautecombe. But we soon found upon this occasion, as we do upon many, if we look the right way for it, that a pleasant route pleasantly passed over, is only a blessing *de plus*, and that neither years nor miles are to be regretted, if we lose not our way as we go. In truth, this expedition to Hautecombe must rest for ever as a red-letter day in our

calendar; for during the many bright hours of it dedicated to this excursion, all that we did seemed to "better what was done."

The position of the abbey is so beautiful, that I think the most picturesque of poets, even Milton himself, might go on dreaming for ever, without being able to conceive any spot more exquisitely lovely, or more aptly fitted for a royal tomb than that on which this venerable sepulchre stands. Some, indeed, might fancy that there would be more of historic gloom, were the stately walls enshrined in groves of sable cypress, or of mournful yew; but I think there is more poetic fitness as it is. The old counts and dukes of Savoy were a race, if their chroniclers may be trusted, as much beloved as honoured, cherishing their own mountains and their native lakes with all the parental love of native sovereigns, and all the filial fondness of long-descended children of the soil. Then where could their honoured relics be left to repose so suitably as on a spot that seems, in its wild yet smiling loneliness, to be a type of the country so every

way their own? And although no sepulchral gloom rests upon it, there is enough of sacred loveliness to render it in every way a fitting place for such a purpose. Stand on the tower of Hautecombe and look around, and you will find that you are shut in by a circle of majestic mountains, once the stern barrier, but now only the most impressive charm of beauteous Savoy; and wide as is the extent of the landscape enclosed within this glorious frame, you will feel that it has, nevertheless, the air of being enshrined and sacred from the world beyond. But the seclusion of the holy abbey itself is closer still; for, whatever the actual fact may be, it looks as if it were utterly unapproachable, save by the means of which we availed ourselves to reach it.

Immediately behind it towers the enormous mountain called "the Mont du Chat," with its three sharp peaks forming the singularly hostile-looking barrier known by the name of the "Dent du Chat," and the little esplanade on which the building stands is so narrow, that, did we not know it was formed by a morsel of

the solid rock, we might be apt to fear that this splendid reliquary, and all the honoured dust it contains, would, in process of time, be washed away by the gentle but incessant movement of the transparent lake, for its *wavelets* seem for ever and for ever to kiss the foot of the sepulchre, as if to do it homage.

Of the interior of the abbey, the best description, I think, for those who will not travel far enough a-field to look at it, is to tell them, that in its costly and admirably well-imagined restorations (rendered necessary by the savage devastations of the French army) it rivals and equals, in happiness of effect, though not in the splendour of its dimensions, the restored shrine of St. Denis. It is certainly impossible to praise too highly the exquisite taste and the learned skill which have been displayed in the restoration of the beautiful little chapel belonging to the abbey. All the richly gothic ornaments have been carved in the beautiful white stone called pierre de Seyssel, in exact imitation of the fragments that had been left; and wherever these fragments were large and

perfect enough to admit it, they have been introduced into the modern work without the slightest injury to the harmony of the whole.

The entering this small, but exquisitely beautiful church from the beautiful scenery without, produces one of the most striking transitions I remember, by the contrast of the delicate purity of its snow-white material, with the gorgeous colouring of the lake and its banks. Of the monuments it would be about equally difficult and useless to speak in detail; the skill with which they have been re-arranged, and indeed, for the most part, reconstructed, leaves nothing to wish for the general effect. Some very good modern painted glass adds greatly to the beauty of the whole, and with all my love of *genuwine* old stones, I should have been greatly ashamed of myself had I fallen so low into the Smellfungus line as to have murmured because these records of the last seven or eight hundred years were the work of yesterday. It was not here that for the first time in my life I felt that the impressions made by poetry are (to me) stronger than

those produced by history; for when I read the name of JEANE DE MONTFORT on one of the splendid tombs, I thought more of Joanna Baillie than of any counts or countesses either of Savoy or de Vaud. Nevertheless, I looked with great and befitting respect on the effigies of a certain Boniface, umwhile Archbishop of Canterbury, a prince of the noble house of Savoy, who, though lent to us as primate during a few years, left his mortal remains to repose among the illustrious dust of his ancestors, having quitted England to visit his brother, the reigning prince, and died on his native soil, in 1270.

Both examined in detail, and enjoyed as a most picturesque *coup d'œil*, the chapel of Hautecombe is full of attraction, and is decidedly one of the buildings that it is more agreeable to enter for the first time than to leave for the last. Whenever this happens, there is a feeling of melancholy produced by this last glance, which seems like a tax paid for the pleasure of the first; but nevertheless it is good to pay it, for it goes to enrich the

general exchequer of memory, and if we did not find it there on looking back, our treasury of recollections would be all the poorer. And so we turned away from this noble sepulchre, now closed for ever; for the old race of Savoy princes being extinct, "its holy earth" is not again to be broken, except for the interment of the venerable widow of the late King of Sardinia.

Our very patient guide next conducted us to the great gates of the abbey, in which there is a handsome set of apartments kept ever ready to receive this Queen-dowager of Sardinia, who, from time to time, gives a few days or weeks there to religious retirement. The monastery still exists, and all the buildings appear in excellent repair, but the number of the community is small. Having seen as much of the establishment as travelling ladies are permitted to visit, our guide welcomed our reappearance at the gate, where he had waited for us, with rather a joyous air, exclaiming, as we again prepared to follow him, "Ah·ça; à present, madame, nous avons

un autre miracle à vous faire voir. Nous allons maintenant à la Fontaine des Merveilles," and it was quite clear that now, at least, he took a strong personal interest in the expedition. The walk from the abbey to this "Fontaine des Merveilles," is along the border of the lake, and occupied us about twenty minutes, perhaps, during which time we gave as much attention as it was possible to withdraw from the charming landscape before us to the good man's eager eloquence on the subject of its mystic qualities. Nobody that really knew anything about the matter, he said, ever pretended to have the least doubt left as to the miraculous source of the fountain. "Is it locked up?" I demanded, "or is everybody that goes by permitted to see it?"

"Locked up!" he repeated; "everybody that goes by permitted to see it! Yes, it is locked up," he replied, after making a curious grimace, accompanied by a flourish of his head, which might, I thought, be intended for the sign of the cross thrown upon the air, "and *certainement*," with strong emphasis, "*cer-*

tainement, everybody that passes by is not permitted to see it."

"I suppose you mean that we are to pay for looking at it?" said I.

"Pay!" he again echoed; "the payment must be offered beforehand, madame, and must be given by prayer." The good man looked so exceedingly solemn, that I thought we were touching upon themes always better avoided on Popish ground. Wherever I find people believing sincerely, I have respect for their belief, and think the miraculous agency of their saints as unsuitable a subject of pleasantry for Roman Catholics as the higher mysteries of our religion are to us. So I attempted to change the subject, and began talking of the lake, and of the "Rocher de Châtillon," dimly visible at the extremity of it. But when I began to inquire if he remembered the visit of the celebrated M. de Lamartine to the residence of M. de Châtillon, placed, as we had heard, with its beautiful gardens, amidst the ruins of the old Château des Sept-Tours, he shook his head, and de-

clared that he knew nothing about the monsieur I talked of, though he knew Châtillon and M. de Châtillon well;—but all *that* was another day's work, and we should find La Fontaine des Merveilles quite enough to satisfy us for to-day; and the next minute he halted, exclaiming, "Voila donc! Nous sommes arrivés." The spot, like all others near it, was very beautiful, and in addition to the lake, and the majestic mountains round it, there was a little grove of chesnut trees, with benches of stone scattered here and there in the welcome shade, which suggested, as plainly as any *sign* could have done, that it was there the felicity hunters of Lake Bourget and Aix-les-Bains were wont to recreate themselves during the least romantic, though perhaps not the least agreeable, hour of their day's rambling. "This is a place for pic-nics!" we exclaimed.

"Je le crois bien," was the gay reply; "et voila! *la fontaine!*"

"Fountain!" said I, "I see nothing but a few pebbles at the bottom of a little pond, completely dry. Is this your fountain?"

The man then led us to the rocky bank, beneath which was the little irregular reservoir I had remarked, and jumping down into it, thrust his fingers into a fissure of what appeared to me to be a block of limestone. "It is from this aperture," he said, "that the water flows when it pleases those who have the keeping of it to let it run." To this he could add nothing whatever in the way of information, though enough in the way of commentary, illustration, and anecdote. He assured us that this intermitting spring was affected, visibly, by no change of weather—that in winter, as in summer, its caprices defied all calculation, that its return was often vainly waited for after the most violent rain, and as often unexpectedly witnessed during long drought. All this we have, of course, inquired into since our visit to Hautecombe, and find that our informant exaggerated in no point respecting the complete uncertainty of the water's return. It is this uncertainty, as we have since been told, which causes all the wonder excited by this particular spring; for intermittent springs have frequently been

met with, but in other cases, if the Savoy savans say sooth, the return of the water has been at regular intervals, which circumstance, they say, renders it easy to account for the phenomenon; but here, at Hautecombe, everything is most delightfully unintelligible, dark, and mysterious; and I sat down in a beautifully shady nook to watch for the water with as much impatience as if its coming, or its not coming, was to be to me, as well as to those who have followed me into the world at the interval of a few dozens of years, a symbol of coming joy or woe.

For, be it known to all whom it may concern, no one who sits beside that mystic basin without seeing the propitious stream flow into it, may hope to find the heart that should answer to their heart, faithful; for, as the current of that living water pauses, falters, and turns aside from the eyes that are longing to behold it, so does the living stream that animated the being they best love pause, falter, and turn aside from its right course, madly careering in another, wherein its un-

stable current anticipates a climate brighter and more congenial than the last; or, to state the mysterious fact in more suitable language, borrowed from a native chronicle, "Si, par malheur, elle (la source) disparaît à votre aspect, et que vous attendiez en vain son retour, hélas! l'oracle à parlé, jeune beauté, consolez vous."

* * * * * *

We had brought with us, as I doubt not many hundreds had done before, wherewithal to make a mid-day repast under the shelter of the chestnut-trees, and while we all three "munched and munched," our guide, who divided his time pretty equally between eating, listening with his ear close to the aperture in the rock, and talking of all the most wondrous stories he could remember, began (as his memory went further and further back to furnish his anecdotes) to talk to us of the Empress Josephine. In none of his narratives was he so pathetic as in that which related to her, and there was positively something exceedingly touching in the manner in which

he recounted it, although, from the age of the man, it was quite impossible that he could have remembered anything about it himself. The unhappy lady, he said, had passed whole days beneath the shade of these chestnut-trees, in the hope of seeing the friendly fountain pour forth its waters at her feet—but in vain! ever, and always in vain! Other people, of all ages and all conditions came in plenty, as they always did, he added, when the winter weather did not make the lake too rough for the pleasure-boats, and scarcely one of them all that, sooner or later, if they had patience to wait till the poor empress lady was gone, did not see the water rush forth from the rock with ten times more than common violence, just as if it were tired, or angry at having been kept back by her presence.

The more than patience, the undeniably deep interest with which I listened to all this, and a great deal more on the same theme—as, for instance, how the hapless Josephine had remained, just on the spot where we were seated, through the whole of one night, and

was found fainting, exhausted, and in despair at the miraculous fruitlessness of her long watch, by the attendants, from whom she had contrived to escape on the preceding evening; —all this, and much, much more, I listened to in a manner but little creditable to my wisdom, I am afraid, and giving very fair occasion to quote upon me—

"Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works."

In self-defence, however, I must just hint that I did not altogether believe in the miraculous and oracular nature of the fountain, (though I had every possible inclination to do so,) but without this, there was quite enough to excite the fancy sufficiently to render the legend, with all its historical freshness, exceedingly captivating. And then, the peculiarity of the scene in which we listened to it; the solemn stillness of the lake, with its glorious frame of mountains, the half-seen towers of Hautecombe Abbey rising behind the trees, the picturesque grouping of the trees themselves, and, first in effect, though last in my cata-

logue, the mysterious-looking rock itself, with its dry, gaping aperture, and the empty reservoir before it, with the pebbles at its bottom, already white, and as free from every appearance of moisture as if no water had visited it since the last long-ago shower of rain! The scene, in short, was both beautiful and interesting in no common degree, and together with the piteous tale and plaintive voice of our historic guide, kept us, long after our repast was ended, very patiently still upon the stone bench beside the rock. But at length we remembered that there were other things to do, and other sights to see, and we civilly hinted as much to our guide, adding, that we had better submit, without further delay, to share the fate of the Empress Josephine, and bid adieu to the inhospitable fountain.

The man looked vexed again, laid his ear against the aperture in the rock, shook his head, looked at the sun, observed that it was late, and, pointing to the dry stones at the bottom of the empty pool, declared that it

must have been so many hours since the water ran last, that it would be a great pity to go without waiting a little longer; for, as the poor empress was dead and gone, there was no danger of its ever being so very long again without running. So once more we began gazing at the lovely lake, at the historic Châtillon in one direction, and the still more historic Hautecombe in the other; at the Mont du Chat; and its savage-looking apex on this side, and the not much tamer outline of the Dent de Nivolet on the other; and thus another half-hour wore away.

During this time, our guide continued, about once in every five minutes, to jump down into the empty basin at the foot of the rock, and apply his ear to the aperture, which still, however, showed no drop of moisture to reward him. All this was done with so many gesticulations, such clasping of his hands, and casting up his eyes in despair, that it suddenly occurred to me that the whole history of the intermittent fountain was an invention, fabricated for the purpose of giving the so-

journers at Aix *une raison de plus* for hiring a boat for the day to cross the Lake de Bourget, for which, save for the accustomed picnicking beside the miraculous fountain, three or four hours might suffice. No sooner did this idea occur to me, than I communicated it with considerable indignation to my companion, and we both started up together, exclaiming that we would wait no longer. Our guide was at that moment with his indefatigable ear again glued against the rock; but, without uttering a word in reply to our somewhat stern announcement, he sprang from his station in the dry pool, and rushing towards us, seized me by the arm, and forcibly drew me to the verge of it.

"Je ne veux pas rester," said I, endeavouring to disengage my arm.

"Ecoutez!" said he, in a whisper, beckoning forward my companion with his finger.

He was instantly by my side, and then in sober truth, we heard the strangest and most unwonted sound imaginable. It certainly was the running of water; but, distant and pent-up

as it was, it sounded infinitely more like a hollow and very dismal groan. I really felt my heart beat as if some supernatural, or at any rate very marvellous operation were in process; but the moments of expectation were of short duration; the hollow sound I have described was speedily changed for what was unmistakably that of running water, and in an instant afterwards out rushed a column of water, so abundant as to fill the receiver with great rapidity. I felt greatly ashamed of the suspicions which I had entertained of the veracity of our poor guide, and the more so when I witnessed the delight with which he hailed the arrival of the stream, which seemed to prove that the previous anxiety he had displayed was not counterfeited. Certainly, it is one of the strangest phenomena I ever witnessed, and it has puzzled, I am told, rather wiser heads than mine. Our guide, all of whose statements I feel particularly bound to believe, repeatedly assured us that neither the season of the year nor the state of the weather made any difference as to the length of time

between the returns of the stream, nor in the quantity which poured forth. The quantity, he said, varied, though not very greatly, but never in accordance with the weather.

Of course, we remained on the spot till the mysterious stream had ceased to flow, and then walked back to the abbey, the state apartments in which, still kept in high order as the occasional religious retreat of the dowager queen of Sardinia, we had not yet seen. The rooms, are plainly, but handsomely furnished—most of them command fine views of the lake, and of the mountains which surround it; yet, nevertheless, I thought there was something singularly dull and dismal in their aspect. The solemn-looking dame, who did us the honour of displaying them to our view, informed us that her dowager-majesty had only left Hautecombe a few days before, having passed a fortnight there in the deepest retirement. This royal lady is, as I have stated above, to have the honour of being buried in the abbey, and is to be the last individual to whom this distinguished resting-place is to be

accorded, the Sardinian crown being no longer in the line of Savoy princes, by whom the venerable shrine was founded above seven hundred years ago.

Our evening voyage across the lake in returning, showed us some beautiful varieties of effect from the glowing lights and long shadows produced by the setting sun. But despite these new beauties, our homeward voyage was not performed without some slight anxiety, for the boatmen descried some fleecy, and as I should have thought, very innocent-looking clouds in the south-west, which they told us were the certain harbingers of a gale of wind. They then amused us with a series of anecdotes in the eclogue style, in which by alternate speeches of constantly *crescendo* eloquence and power, they gave us to understand that the seemingly tranquil water on which we were floating, notwithstanding its excelling beauty, and the soft *couleur de rose* that it reflected, was occasionally subject to very violent and ungovernable fits of fury, during which many boats were overset, and lives now

and then lost. They reminded each other also that we had reached the month of September, and then, after lowering their voices to a very sinister whisper, they set about taking down the awning, assuring us that we should be much safer without it. When this operation was completed, they reseated themselves, with many injunctions to me not to be frightened, for that they should now be able to make more way with their oars, and whether impelled by real danger, or only the pleasure and possible advantage of talking of it, I know not, but certain it is that they now made their way across in vastly less time than it had taken us to go exactly the same distance in the morning.

By the time we reached the shore, however, though we perceived no symptom of storm on the lake, the sky was looking in all directions surly and cross, instead of bright and smiling, and there was wind enough to make the dust of the very dusty road to the town exceedingly disagreeable. This, and the many hours of rambling we had indulged in, made me again

feel that the lake was much too far from Aix to permit its being such an endless and ceaseless source of enjoyment to the company there as it would be, were it as near as Derwent Water to Keswick, or Windermere to Ambleside. Whether the predicted gale arrived during the night I know not, having slept most profoundly till a very bright sun awakened me on the following morning, just in time to get ready for an early breakfast before setting off for the celebrated Lake of Annecy. Nearly the whole way from Aix-les-Bains to the town of Annecy, the road is interesting, either from the beauty of the scenery it commands or from the circumstances of its local history. But of all the traditions belonging to this region, so rich in old romance, the most recent is (contrary to custom) the one which seizes the most powerfully on the imagination and the feelings.

The beautiful Hortense de Beauharnais, ex-queen of Holland, passed some weeks of the summer of 1813 at Aix-les-Bains, with a small retinue of intimate and attached friends and

adherents. The favourite amusement of the party consisted in making daily excursions to many beautiful and interesting spots in the neighbourhood. On the morning of the 10th of June, Hortense declared her intention of visiting the Lake of Annecy, and passing an hour or two in sailing and rowing upon it. Her favourite attendant and friend, the young and lovely Baronne de Broc, besought her to change her project, and to devote the morning to Grezz, its venerably historic tower, and its wild and romantic cascade. "No, not to-day," was the reply; "to-day must be for Annecy;" and the party set off accordingly.

On reaching the point in the road from whence the rude path to the cascade of Grezz is visible, the Baronne de Broc renewed her entreaties that they might visit the cascade, if only to give it one short glance in passing, and her entreaties prevailed; the gentle-tempered queen was not proof against the pertinacity of her favourite—the carriages were ordered to stop, and the whole party descended, and pursued the short but rough path

that leads to the cascade. The fall of water is but trifling, but there is something in the dark colour and wild formation of the rocks around it that is very striking, and the party stood delighted on the edge of the gulf, contemplating the scene. A grotesque-looking mill, so grotesque as not greatly to injure the wild character of the spot, stands on the very brink of the precipice, and the miller, as was his wont, scrupled not to leave his business within the building for the more profitable occupation of escorting the ladies who ventured to brave all the dangers of slippery paths engulfing whirlpools, and over-hanging precipices, for the sake of enjoying the miniature horrors of this singular scene. But the Baronne de Broc sedulously avoided his assistance, as well as that offered by the gentlemen of the party. Her delight at having overcome the opposition of the queen is described as having been beyond measure great; she repeatedly clapped her hands, in triumphant glee, during the walk from the carriage to the cataract, and, on arriving, immediately separated herself from

the rest of the party, in a sort of ecstasy of admiration that seemed to demand the freedom of solitude for its full indulgence.

There is one spot still pointed out, though the approach to it has now been so artificially arranged as nearly to destroy all vestige of what it is said to have been, from whence the cascade is seen to peculiar advantage, but it was then not to be reached without danger and difficulty. Towards this point, Madame de Broc was making her way alone, when she suddenly stopped, and throwing up her arms, exclaimed, "Dieu! que c'est beau!" and almost in the same instant her foot slipped, and she was precipitated into the frightful chasm below. The words above quoted were the last sounds she was heard to utter. Every possible effort was made to save her, but in vain. Her mutilated body was speedily brought to shore, but every symptom of life was extinct, not, as it appeared from drowning, but from the concussion against the rocks, occasioned by the turbulence of the whirlpool into which she fell. The agony of the poor queen is related to have

been dreadful, and it is said to have been long before her health recovered from the shock. She immediately caused a monument to be erected on the spot, which, while it considerably interferes with the picturesque wildness of the scene, atones for it by the sad, but interesting recollections which it recalls. The inscription was dictated by the mourning queen herself. There is something pretty and touching in the argument used to enforce caution on the future visitors of the same perilous spot.

"Madame la Baronne de Broc, agée de 25 ans, a péri sous les yeux de son amie, le 10 juin, 1813.

"O vous qui visitez ces lieux! n'avancez qu'avec précaution sur ces abîmes; *songez à ceux que vous aiment!*"

There was something so melancholy in the story, so dark and dreary-looking in the spot, and so exciting from the various ghostly details recorded by the man who was standing close beside the unfortunate Hortense at the moment her fearful shriek announced the

catastrophe, and who still occupies the rude dwelling beside the cataract, that it required a mile or two of beautiful scenery to restore our spirits. But there is something in the aspect of Alby, where we stopped to enjoy an hour's delicious ramble, well calculated to chase all sorts of disagreeable images from the mind. The wild ravine, through which the little river Chéran runs, the fine bridge over it, and the tumble-down old town itself, with its superb background of mountains, produce such a variety of lovely landscapes within the circuit of a single mile, that an artist might easily fill a huge portfolio without going beyond it.

From Alby to Annecy a succession of lovely scenes, charmingly diversified by bare and towering mountain-tops, pine forests, with spots of the prettiest sylvan scenery interspersed, following each other with the most enchanting variety, amuse the eye till Annecy itself, with its busy but primitive-looking population, and its strikingly "Prout-like" bits of town landscape, becomes visible, and then a perfectly

new set of ideas arise to occupy the mind. Here again, as at Chambéry, the memory of the unfortunate Rousseau comes full upon one. It was here that he first saw Madame de Warens, and repaid the shelter that her careless and promiscuous hospitality afforded him, not only with his whole heart, poor silly boy, but by the most abject, subjection of the moral sense, and, in fact, of all healthful judgment upon every subject, that ever fell upon the youthful mind. There is but one way of deriving pleasure from thus contemplating the early scenes of this great writer's existence, and that is by tracing in the majestic natural features of the region, the source of that enthusiastic love for the beauties of nature, which inspired the finest bursts of feeling upon the subject that mortal man has ever found the power to express.

The whole of that evening and the following day was not too much to bestow upon Annecy and its glorious lake. Yet glorious is no fitting epithet for it, for the term seems to imply extent, noble from its vastness, and

features grand, even perhaps to severity. Such a word might better befit the gigantic lakes of Erie or Ontario, and if so, it is indeed but little applicable to that of Annecy, for it would not, I think, be easy to find any scenes upon the earth's surface, in all respects more perfectly dissimilar. The American lakes are almost awful in their vastness, and startling from their boisterous resemblance to the distant ocean; but I doubt if even the sturdy patriotism of a New Yorkist could ascribe any beauty to their murky waves, or to their tame shores either; whereas the lovely little lake of Savoy cannot be looked at in any direction without conveying to the mind a sense of beauty that will almost

> "—— Take the 'prison'd soul,
> And lap it in Elysium,"

as effectually as the song of "Circe with her syrens three." Nor is there a mountain-top, a crag, a ruined watch-tower, or scathed fragment of a mouldering wall, each and all becoming visible from side to side as your little

bark glides on, which is not redolent of deep historic interest. Madame de Stael says, with her usual unfailing truth of observation, that no mere beauty of landscape can long atone to the mind for the absence of all record of those who have occupied the world before us. It is the frequent recurrence of such records which makes the travelling through Savoy so like passing, in body as well as in mind, through the scenes of an historical romance.

In countries possessed of greater facilities for manufactories and commerce, and where greater encouragement is given for the exercise of industry in all branches, this charm of course cannot exist in the same degree, and the more reasonable portion of mankind probably console themselves for the want of it by many philosophical, political, and statistical observations, all tending to prove that the "go-ahead" system is infinitely more profitable than the *statu-quo;* and desperately bold, most assuredly, would the lover of old walls and unmined mountains be who should seriously attempt to deny it. But, as the old song says,

"For a' that, and for a' that,"

it is very delightful to wander through a land where little, save what may be easily traced as the slow, dignified, and venerable work of time, has been done to efface the features left by the human beings who looked out upon the same scenes centuries and centuries ago. Luckily for the idle ones who love occasionally to dream through a summer month or two in this manner, there are never wanting, in some queer little bookseller's shop or other in the old towns of such a country as Savoy, a volume of legends, or of graver local history, and well-received tradition, which serve better than even Murray's matchless "Hand-books" themselves, as guides upon such an expedition. One of the first duties to which my companion addresses himself upon our arriving at any town from whence we mean to start upon an exploring ramble, is to enter some such shop or shops, and possess himself of one or more of the dusky, dusty, grey-papered little volumes which his inquiries are pretty sure to bring forth. At Chambéry we might have

got a score or two of these venerable chronicles without difficulty, and though we did not increase our travelling library to this extent, we obtained more than one volume, half-truth, half-fable, in which graphic and familiar mention was made of all the castles, convents, towns, and villages of the region we desired to explore; and more than once it has happened to us, after reading in these half-romances of a "*beau sire*" who had set off upon an expedition that led through many perils, from stronghold to stronghold, in a direction where the scenery was tempting, and the ruins of a tower or a castle here and there, by way of guide-posts, were sure to be met with, that we have literally set off upon the route described.

I am not quite sure, however, that I can recommend this scheme with a safe conscience, as being the best mode of seeing the country; for although the whole of Savoy is full of interesting relics of the days that are gone, the progress from one town to another, even though the fragment of a tower or two having abundance of traditionary lore attached to

them, may be encountered *en route*, will not lead through scenes quite as romantic as those traversed by the "*beau sire*," aforesaid. Old chronicles say that the name of Savoy was formerly *Malevoie*, an appellation given to it on account of the danger of travelling through its wild roads; the mountain caves and the pine-forests near which they passed furnishing shelter to innumerable bandits. But since the days of the magnanimous Berold, says the same authority, the country has been so much better ordered, that the banditti have disappeared, and the name *Sauvevoie* has been assumed instead. That this improved state of things is very devoutly to be hailed as a blessing, I certainly will not deny; but it is not the less certain that a broad, well-kept, high-road, is a less picturesque object than a wild ravine, and that the groups of hard-featured women, carrying their heavy weaver's beams, round which is wound the delicate tissue of silk for which Chambéry, Faverges, and various other towns in the neighbourhood are

renowned, are by no means so startling and Salvator-like as those encountered when Sauvevoie was Malevoie.

But notwithstanding these discrepancies between the things that have been, and the things that are, our old books did us, as I have said, very excellent service, and lent a degree of interest to our exploring rambles, which most certainly they would not have possessed in anything like an equal degree without them. How, for instance, as we glided over the bright waters of Annecy, should we have discovered that the little town which displayed so much picturesque Christianity behind us, owed its (*soi-disant*) foundations to a colony from Egypt, and that its first adorations were offered to Apis? Or where should we have learned to treat with proper contempt the authors who have pretended to trace symptoms of Celtic origin in the crumbling ruins among which we so greatly delighted to wander? When, in fact, the mighty Gauls were the first who laid stone on stone in these regions, either

for shelter or defence; whereas no traces of Celtic workmanship can be found, save in the caves and subterranean grottoes, which were their only abodes, which were afterwards used by the Gauls for the purpose of concealing their harvests, and traces of which may be found in various parts of Savoy at the present day? Nay, how should we ever have known that we ought to stop our bark opposite to the lovely park-like bit of scenery that nestles under the snow-capped majesty of Mount Tournette, and pass an hour in wandering about the Château de Menthon, the birthplace of the universally venerated St. Bernard, who has been aptly enough styled the Apostle of the Alps?

This fact, however, I confess, is perhaps sufficiently notorious to have reached us without the assistance of our old books; but I doubt if we should ever have found out, had we unfortunately been without them, the very important circumstance, that the spotless genealogy of "Les Sires de Menthon," the founders of this historic edifice, is not only

absolument sans tache, but of such high antiquity, that one among them has inscribed upon a marble tablet, which still exists, "*Ante Christum natum jam baronatus eram.*" Upon the same authority, however, I can undertake to say, that highly respectable, and indeed venerable, as this degree of antiquity may appear to us mushroom islanders, so many of whom are quite contented if we can trace our names and race up to the Norman conquest, it gives, in this land of old tradition, only a so-so sort of claim to the honour of long-traced descent, because, as we well knew, we judge of all things by comparison, and the "Sires de Sales" have taken for their historic *pourpris*, "*antiquam Abraham fieret ego sum*,"—which to us ignorant heretics, perhaps may sound a little profane—but as the relics of a saint of this ancient race repose (together with those of the highly-esteemed friend, La Mère Chantal,) in the sanctuary of the cathedral of Annecy, it might seem like presumption to doubt its propriety.

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But I might fill a volume were I to enumerate all the enjoyment we found in our Savoy wanderings, or all the advantages we derived from the lore we picked up on the way.

ONE MORE SAVOY RAMBLE.

ONE MORE SAVOY RAMBLE.

"Once more unto the *heights*, dear friends,
Once more."

THERE is but one way, as I think, by which the traveller who loves to spin long yarns concerning the fondly-remembered journeys he has taken—there is but one way by which he can repay the debt of gratitude he lies under to those who are so obliging as to listen to him, and that is, by making the said long yarns serve as a clue to lead safely up hill, and down dale, the steps of all such kind listeners as may be tempted by his tale to arouse themselves, gird up their loins, and follow his wanderings through the scenes he has described. It would be scarcely fair, however, to expect

that the conscientious traveller should keep his grateful project of remuneration so steadily in view as never to pause for a moment, as he spins his clue, in order to indulge in a little gossip, not quite essential perhaps to the well doing of those who take him as a guide. In good truth, the temptation is too strong to be resisted; and it should be remembered that this very lingering over the scenes described, is so strong an indication of the pleasure which the mere recollection of them produces, that it may be safely received in evidence of their being worth the visiting.

Bear with me then, patiently, gentle listener, although it is again of Savoy, beautiful, wild, historic, strong-featured Savoy, that I am about to talk, and to exercise your patience. I can assure you that I intend to be very useful in my gossip, not only pointing out to you sundry things that you would do well to see, but cautioning you against some others that you would do well to avoid, or if not exactly to avoid, at any rate to approach with caution. But before I come to these very useful parti-

culars, let me utter a few more admonitory words of general remonstrance, to the multitude of travellers who leave home with the *idée fixé* of Rome in their heads, to a degree that seems to preclude the possibility of their receiving any other.

Truly, dear countrymen and countrywomen, it is a lamentable thing that you should suffer yourselves to be borne along over such a country as this of Savoy, without pausing for a month, a week, or even a day, to see what nature has done for it. It is no excuse for you that you have the eternal city in view, for as reasonably when you get there might you shut your eyes as you go over the bridge of St. Angelo, because you set off from your hotel for the purpose of seeing St. Peter's. Think better of it next time. There will be a next time—for how few there are who, having once taken courage to cross the stern barrier which divides the rest of the earth from its museum, its garden, its most venerable library, the tomb of its heroes, and the shrine of its saints, —how few of them wend their homeward way

without promising to their hearts that they will come again? Next time, therefore, use more wisdom, look more deliberately about you, and take care to remember all I am now going to say to you.

* * * * * *

Of course, we did not leave Annecy without making the beautifully situated Château de Daing, or Daingt, an excuse for passing another delicious hour or two on its lake, the best manner of reaching it from Annecy being by a boat; but the château, save for its singularly beautiful position, is no longer so interesting to travellers as formerly. A few years ago, its beautiful apartments were let singly, if required, together with all the other accommodations of a regular *pension*, to any one whose taste, leading them to such a resting place in this charming country for a few days, preferred the quiet retirement of such an abode to the certain noise and doubtful comforts of an hotel. But this is no longer the case: the mansion and grounds have become the property of a gentleman who resides there

with his family. I mention this in order to fulfil my promise of being useful, as it may save from disappointment those who, reading in the guide-books that the beautiful Château de Daing has been opened as a *pension*, might arrange their plans accordingly.

Annecy-le-vieux may be deemed worth climbing to by those who have time to spare, and who wish to look out upon the country from a tolerably elevated point of view; but it is to professed antiquaries only that I should point out this excursion as indispensable. From Annecy we proceeded in our pleasant, queer little carriage, to Faverges, and after one of those particularly clean and comfortable coffee-and-milk breakfasts which now and then occur on exploring expeditions, we walked up to its finely-placed castle. Horace Walpole warned me long ago, even in the days of my youth, against what he terms the "*issimo*" style of description; and questionless, the warning was a wholesome one; nevertheless, there are some things that it would be difficult to describe, save by the use of the superlative,

and the view from the hill upon which the castle of Faverges stands is among them. As for the castle itself, it has greatly changed its character since it was the scene of knightly deeds and knightly splendour, having so greatly sunk in glory, and risen in utility, as to be converted from a warlike stronghold into a manufactory of silks and satins.

I had been reading, the evening before, some pages of Monsieur Ménabréa's interesting volumes, entitled "Les Alpes Historiques"—(we do, now and then, get sight of a new book, as well as of our beloved old legends,) and had been much amused by his historic sketch of the gradual declension of feudal greatness and chivalric glory, and of the symptoms of both, which the dwellings of nobles built, or repaired, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, (castles though they were, "avec tours, fossés, pont-levis, créneaux, et machicoulis, vains simulaires d'une grandeur déchue") displayed. A step further towards our actual condition was made evident enough by inscriptions like the following, being con-

spicuously placed on the mansion which Réné Favre built at Proméry, near Annecy.

"Pain, Paix, Peu."

And again,

"Il n'y a autre noblesse,
Que celle que vertu laisse."

Both these, as well as various others in the same spirit, were from the pen of Claude Mermet, whose volume of "*poesies*" was published at Lyons in 1583. Another specimen is cited from the same hand, still more *modern* in its feeling.

"Tu prétends estre gentil-homme
Par la faveur du parchemin:
Qu'un sot se trouve en ton chemin
Tu seras puis simplement homme."

This certainly shows an advanced "march of mind" for remote Savoy in the sixteenth century; and the old baronial castle of Faverges converted into a receptacle for silk-looms, looks as if the march had gone steadily on. Shall we live to see the stout old walls of Caernarvon, Chepstow, Ragland, or Goodrich,

converted to similar purposes? The effect of this metamorphosis on the mind is very striking. We had been told that we must not fail to mount to the castle of Faverges, for the purpose of looking at the magnificent view it commands; and we set off accordingly, despite a burning sun, to climb the steep height on which this nobly placed edifice stands.

These mountain strongholds are so constantly placed on elevations difficult of access, that we have become perfectly well broken-in to the toil of mounting to them; and however varied we may find, on examination, such portions of the old fabrics as remain standing, the process of looking for, and finding, the principal features of all such structures has become as familiar to us as the preliminary act of climbing. And so strongly marked do we always discover the enduring features of strength and power to be in all of them, and so forcibly does every object on such spots set the imagination upon recalling the deeds of daring and of dread that have been enacted thereon, that it is almost impossible not to fall

again and again into waking dreams of feudal tyranny and chivalric valour, peopling the scene with warlike and picturesque figures of all sorts, and becoming every moment further and further removed in spirit from the very literally "working-day-world" propensities of the time present.

Such being the habitual state of mind of castle-ruin hunters, it is not very difficult to imagine the sort of contrast produced upon their senses by beholding, as they at length master the last steep turning of the ascent on which the castle of Faverges is situated, a tame quadrangle of white-washed walls, perforated with abundance of little square windows, with looms visible through the open casements, and busy figures flitting to and fro, bearing about them every imaginable mark of the manufacturing activity of the nineteenth century.

"Can this be the castle of Faverges?" said I, somewhat wearied by the long ascent, and at least half-angry at finding that it had only brought me to a dirty-looking workshop.

"Yes, truly," replied my companion, "it must be the old castle, though strangely metamorphosed." And on looking about a little, it was easy enough to trace some of the outworks, though not in a condition to redeem, in any degree, the undignified aspect of the umwhile fortress. Having finished this very unsatisfactory survey, I was preparing to follow the example of that King of France, who

"Marched up the hill, and then marched down again;"

but my companion suggested that it might be as well to advance a few steps farther, as it was probable, from the form of the hill we had mounted, that we should by doing so command an extensive view. And these few steps farther did, indeed, give us such a landscape to look down upon, as speedily made me forget the want of "the quarry of old stones," amongst which I had expected to amuse myself;—wherefore I strongly advise all those who afford themselves, in travelling, sufficient time to look at what is worth seeing, to indulge in just such an hour of idleness as we

enjoyed within the space of half a mile beyond the *ci-devant* castle of Faverges.

It surely is a merciful dispensation of Providence which causes the difference between one human being and another, in the sensations produced by the sight of new and beautiful scenery. What a horde of wanderers would all the nations of the earth become, did everybody love the sight of new hills and valleys as I do! As to inns, hotels, caravansaries, and all such convenient inventions, they would become as much beyond the hope of the majority of ordinary mortals, as turtle-soup and venison-haunches surpass that of the guests of the table (*pas d'hôte*) of a union workhouse.

Inns and hotels! I doubt greatly if we should all find room enough to pitch our little canvas tents without finding ourselves occasionally such very near neighbours as to produce mutual inconvenience, by making the outpourings of our respective picturesque raptures overheard by each other. Providentially, however, as I said before, Nature, with her

usual characteristic benignity, has taken care that no such inconvenient crowding upon her favourite spots shall take place. The diversity between man and man respecting their susceptibility to harmony of sound, the enjoyment where it is, and the suffering where it is not, is not more strongly marked than the inequality, both of pleasure and pain, produced by what is lovely, or otherwise, in objects which influence us solely through the medium of the eye.

I remember hearing a very clever man, and one whose keenly observant philosophy, when employed upon the moral phenomena of the world, has made a most justly popular writer —I well remember his saying to me, that few things occasioned him a sharper annoyance than the being called upon to sympathize with the lovers of fine scenery.

"In passing either up or down any of the famous rivers," said he (and he was a great traveller), "which are the favourite resort of steam-boats and hunters for the picturesque, I invariably ensconce myself in the cabin, and

by devoting myself immovably either to reading or writing, continue to escape the horrible persecution of being asked every other minute, 'Is it not beautiful?'"

Yet this person was as far the reverse of dull as Hyperion of a satyr. Let no one therefore—and trust me, all ye who kindle at a landscape, the advice is good—let no one, upon feeling his heart swell, and his spirit expand itself into an increased capability of happiness, at the sight of fine scenery, imagine that it is the result of superior intellectual organization. It is the result of no such thing, but simply and solely of that sort of justness of vision which detects harmony, or the want of it, both in the form and colour of everything it looks upon. And this species of perfection in the sense has no more claim to intellectual superiority than has the gift inherent in some mortals, greatly over "other some," of discerning the quality of whatever is submitted to the sense of taste. It may often, moreover, be remarked—at least my own observation leads me to think so—that where

the organization of one sense is particularly perfect, that of the rest is very much so too. I have never known a painter who was not fond of music, or a musician who was not fond of painting; and I have known repeated instances in which both the one and the other have been applied to as the best amateur, and most unprejudiced authority, for the purpose of passing judgment upon the flavour of wines. I knew one painter, and a very clever one, who, being a great snuff taker, most scrupulously kept one nostril undefiled from the approach of the "titillating dust," that he might not lose or impair his power of enjoyment in sweet odours.

But all this nicety of sense has nothing to do with intellect; *ergo*, a love of landscape may very modestly be spoken, nay, boasted of as a source of pleasure, without any assumption of intellectual superiority. When it does happen, however, that this fine material organization is united to superior intellectual capacity, the result is astoundingly brilliant. Listen to Milton when he employs his breathing thoughts

and burning words in descriptions of the beauties or the harmonies either of nature or of art. But Milton was a scholar, and may be supposed to have found his wondrous mastery of expression in his learning. Let those who think so, turn to Shakspeare, and they will find that an exalted intellect, *fitted up* with a fine organization, will do quite as well with little or no learning (commonly so called) at all.

Such is the human animal, when exhibited to us without accident or unfavourable influence of any kind—and it is only the contemplation of such a specimen which can lessen the difficulty of comprehending the high station assigned him in creation; without this, one might sometimes be tempted to think, when looking a little curiously at the souls and bodies of those around us, that a place a *good deal* lower than the angels might do for them. But this burst of thankfulness for the blessings accruing from so many human beings staying at home, and leaving the high-roads free for such as like better to go abroad, has carried me so far away from the beautiful

bit of terrace ground behind the castle of Faverges, that I know not how to get back to it gracefully. There we lay, however, stretched at lazy length upon a grassy bank, looking down upon what seemed extent enough for half a world, wishing each other heartily joy of our wandering propensities, and sketching plans for future journeyings; and, notwithstanding my consciousness of the great advantages we enjoy from some people remaining at home, I am benevolent enough to hope that of those who *do* follow my rambling example, some few may find themselves either on that spot or some other near it equally beautiful, and rejoice in the fate which brought them there as heartily as we did.

Our next stage was to Ugine, as dirty and as ugly a little town as can well be imagined, but placed in the midst of scenery so very beautiful as to make one think that if it were possible to take lodgings for a week on the roof of one of the repulsive-looking houses, instead of within it, the scheme might answer. On the opposite side of the river Arly is the

prosperous little town of Beaufort, the original cradle of the two noble races which have become native both to England and to France.

We reached the town formerly known as l'Hôpital, but now very absurdly, and, as it sounds to my ears, barbarously, renamed Albertsville, which, as far as a name can do it, gives a sort of transatlantic newness to a place which ought to be redolent of old historic reminiscences without end. It is becoming, however, a very busy and flourishing town, with clean-looking streets, good inns, and handsome houses. Nevertheless, we turned away from all those blessings, (not, however, till after we had dined exceedingly well,) and crossed the Arly to Conflans, the exquisitely picturesque crumbling old town, that still hangs, as it were in fragments, upon the steep rocks on the left-hand side of the river. And here, again, is one of those cases in which the post-haste "go-ahead" class of travellers pass by, and lose for ever one of the finest scenes that the eye can look upon. I greatly doubt if the justly celebrated North-terrace at Heidelberg must not

yield the palm of beauty to the platform behind the old castle at Conflans. From under the shelter of one or two magnificent old trees, that seem to have been nourished for ages by miracle, so lofty and so bare is the bold rock on which they stand—from under the shelter of these noble trees we looked down upon the junction of the Arly with the Isere, the broad, rich valley of the latter stretching away for many a mile in one direction—the smaller, narrower, ruder valley of the Doran in another —the town of l'Hôpital on the opposite bank, and the whole framed-in by majestic mountains, here clothed half way up with forests of various foliage, there "horrent" with bristling crags, and awful by their tremendous precipices.

Again and again, and still again, did we slowly pace along the low wall which surrounds this glorious platform; and though it was a sad business to turn away and leave it, and that I pitied myself very much at the moment for the necessity which compelled me to it, I certainly pity those very greatly more who have never seen it at all; for it is quite a mistake that

when you turn away from such spots as the terrace at Heidelberg, and the platform at Conflans, you lose them altogether. On the contrary, they are calculated to live upon the memory with a distinctness which enables you to recall them for ever.

Nothing could be much more strongly contrasted than the species of gratification to which we turned upon leaving the platform, and that which we had enjoyed while on it. In the view from this last-named spot there is all the vigorous and eternal youth of everlasting nature, and the sensation it produces is a sort of triumphant gladness at being permitted to live and look upon it; but passing under the arch which leads from the old fortress to the town, you come upon the most complete epitome of human labour in decay that the eye can look upon. I was almost tempted to believe, as I looked at the crumbling walls, the sinking arches, the unspeakable air of desolation that pervaded every part of this rapidly perishing old stronghold, and its picturesque dependencies, that it had all been left without

any effort at repair, from the day that it so reluctantly yielded to the battering of Francis the First, to the present hour.

And, were we told that such was the fact, its condition would be easily understood, and little wonder, if any, excited by its not being in a still worse condition. But there *is* cause to wonder now. Why is it that, with a flourishing, young-looking town at the distance of half a mile, where the appearance of active industry is so remarkable as to render it impossible to doubt the certainty of finding employment there—why is it that, with this refuge before their eyes, the population of Conflans, amounting to above a thousand souls, still continues in dirt, in poverty, in ruin, and in wretchedness so evident and so revolting? Yet in spite of all this melancholy desolation, in spite even of the dirt and the squalid wretchedness which meet the eye in every direction, there is a strange, mysterious charm about the old place which made us linger in it almost as unaccountably as the inhabitants themselves.

Never can I forget the aspect of the old

church, or the circumstances which attended our entrance into it. The light was already failing when we reached the door, but we were neither of us disposed to pass the dingy, tattered curtain which hung over it without lifting it up, and accordingly we did lift it up and walk in. The atmosphere was dim and dark, and that indescribable odour of mildew pervaded it, which seems to threaten health even while it suggests such enticing thoughts of picturesque desolation as to render retreat impossible. So on we went; and the next sensation we felt was considerably more alarming, and without any agreeable attraction at all; for the floor, which was of wood, creaked, cracked, and positively seemed giving way under our feet. Yet on we went still, for, dimly visible in the distance, was a dark object, which there was not light enough to enable us to make out, but which we declared to each other we must examine before we returned again to the sweet fresh air without.

So on we went, and came at last close, oh! very close to the object which had excited our

curiosity, and then, notwithstanding the thickening gloom, we perceived with quite sufficient plainness that it was a coffin. It was of very decent blackness, but perfectly without decoration of any kind, and we perceived as we gazed at it that the lid, for the gratification either of affection or curiosity, was laid loosely on it, and might be removed at pleasure. It seemed not, however, to be our pleasure to remove it, for we both gazed on the narrow aperture left at the head without making any effort to increase it. *What* it was I felt at that moment I am really and sincerely unable to say. I do not, however, quite think that I expected the loose lid of the coffin to remove itself and startle me by the exhibition of the corpse beneath. Neither do I feel called upon to confess that I conceived there was any chance that the spirit of the departed would appear to chide us for our bold and somewhat irreverent approach to the relics he had so recently bequeathed to earth. But to speak honestly, telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I did not by any

means feel comfortable. So I made a sort of stumbling step backwards, and then I fancied that I felt the floor decidedly giving way; and really, considering the condition of the planks of which it was formed, and the apparent weight of the coffin, the idea was by no means very preposterous; a fact which I recal and record with some satisfaction, inasmuch as it may help to explain the irregular pulsation of the heart, of which I confess I was conscious, without leaving me quite bare to the imputation of having been afraid of a ghost. There is much comfort in this.

On leaving this musty, mouldering, dark, dank, and most dismal edifice, we asked a miserable-looking old man, in a sort of ecclesiastical but most particularly nasty garment, whom we encountered on the steps, whose body it was that was lying before the altar. "That of the priest of the parish," he replied. "He died yesterday, and will be buried to-morrow."

How deliciously sweet did the fresh air feel and smell! and how gaily did it seem to move and play around us as we turned away from this

abode of death and desolation, in order to cross the pretty bridge over the Arly, which looked, with its air of steady usefulness, like a quiet friend stretching out a hand to lead us back again to light and life, and our very comfortable hotel in the unromantic but life-like town of Albertsville. Yet, nevertheless, when we had got half across this friendly bridge, we could not advance a step farther till we had indulged for a few minutes in the contemplation of the beautiful twilight landscapes, up the stream and down the stream, which it commanded. Why should Lord Byron, when speaking of a lovely country, call its beauty a "fatal gift?" How can that gift be fatal which causes pleasure as pure as it is intense? It is surely quite a poetic illusion to fancy that any country ever became "the plunderer's common prey" on account of its picturesque scenery; and therefore I hold such gracious combinations of rock and forest, mountain and valley, bright herbage and running streams, as we gazed upon from this bridge over the Arly, as a very blessed gift indeed. Thankful am

I for my share of it! I would not lose my memory of all the objects I looked upon during the evening of that bright 18th of September, 1843, notwithstanding its ghostly interlude, for more than I will say.

* * * * * *

I did not dream of the coffined priest of Conflans, but slept as soundly as those ought to sleep who intend to get up at five o'clock in the morning, and to start off again before breakfast in search of "fresh fields and pastures new." And at five o'clock we did get up, with the habitual punctuality which has so often enabled me and mine to go farther and see more within a given space of time than most people. I believe I have boasted rather often of this wakeful virtue already, but I do it without scruple; first, because it is not one of those magnificent virtues which require for its production any of the mental qualities which it looks like vanity to claim; and, secondly, because, as a traveller, addressing travellers, I feel that it would be impossible to recommend any habit of equally important

utility. Punctually then did we set off at five o'clock, intending to breakfast at St. Pierre d'Albigny, and afterwards to visit the ruined castle of Miolans,—to see which was, in truth, the principal object of the day, it being, both in an historical and picturesque point of view, one of the most remarkable objects in Savoy.

My English stay-at-home friends perhaps may be apt to think that five o'clock in the morning, on the 19th of September, must have been a moment more chilly than cheering for setting off upon an expedition in an open carriage. But they must permit me to tell them that they are altogether mistaken. Though Savoy has been called the twin-sister of Switzerand, she is nevertheless first cousin to Italy; and anything more delicious than the sweet fresh breath of her mountains at the splendid moment when the glorious sun of the south has climbed high enough to give them his first warm smile, it is beyond my power to imagine.

No fog, no mist, no unfriendly exhalation of any kind, made us repent our having exchanged

our beds for the high-road. But what a high-road it is! Now close beside the river, now high above it. At one moment "elevated, rapt," by catching a glance of some bare towering crag, that one feels certain must be the home of eagles; and the next enchanted by the sight of vineyards, and bleating flocks and lowing herds, and everything else that can suggest ideas of rural ease and plenty. It is, in truth, a most lovely land; and had it not the "fatal gift" of lying on the high-road to Italy, and being therefore considered merely as so much envious intervening space which all travellers of taste ought to gallop over as rapidly as possible, it would long ago have been as much celebrated as its neighbours.

An hour or two of this bright, exhilarating progress brought us to a spot at which our driver stopped; and, pointing with his whip to a towering rock to the right, still, however, at a considerable distance before us, but conspicuous from its elevation of nearly a thousand feet above the river, he said, "There stands the castle of Miolans." I have an inveterate habit,

which is often, certainly, a very silly one, of wanting to get out of the carriage and walk, the moment some particularly interesting object comes in sight; overlooking the very important fact, that in nine cases out of ten the desired object would be much more quickly reached by my sitting still. However, upon this occasion it certainly seemed to be a matter of doubt whether we really should not be doing well to leave the carriage and take an exquisitely inviting upward path, which the man told us, and told us truly, was the *shortest* road to Miolans, which moreover could not, he said, be reached in any direction by the carriage. The chief objection to our making the excursion from this point, instead of from St. Pierre d'Albigny, was the delay of our breakfast, a part of the day's duty for which our three or four hours' drive had already prepared us very effectually.

But there were three reasons which, fasting though we were, decided us upon enduring this delay. The first was, that it would enable the driver to bespeak the repast, and to have

a room comfortably prepared for us. The second, that the town of St. Pierre d'Albigny was at a much greater distance from the castle than the point at which we had stopped; and the third, that the labour of the ascent would be greatly more fatiguing when the sun was higher than at present. This last consideration decided the question; for, although it was certain that we should have to traverse the distance from the ruin to the town in either case, it was evident that it would be a much easier business to descend from the rock at nine o'clock, than ascend to it at eleven, and so we sent off the carriage, and began mounting the steep path that pointed direct to the iron-looking fortress we wished to reach. The *steep path!* Oh what a gentle phrase is here for the well nigh perpendicular acclivity which rose before us. There is a proverb, a Latin one if I mistake not, which says that a pleasant companion on a journey does very well in the place of a carriage. But if this be ever true in the case of a lady, *not young*, I am strongly of opinion that it cannot be so

in mounting a path as nearly perpendicular as that which led us to the castle of Miolans, and that too before breakfast: for that *my* companion during the expedition I am describing was

All that *aged mothers* fancy when they love,

I am perfectly prepared to testify: nevertheless, I am fain to confess that I should have been exceedingly well pleased to have been conveyed to the top by means of other limbs than my own. Not, however, that anything in the shape of a carriage could have been dragged up it; but a donkey or a mule would have been a blessing past all price. I am a tolerably good walker too, and very rarely complain of the steepness of an ascent, being for the most part quite willing to pay the tax of moderate fatigue for the *belvédére* which is its usual reward. But in this case our treacherous coachman, in order to avoid the having to take our carriage up the practicable road leading from the town of d'Albigny to the castle of Miolans, had recommended to us a

track little fitted for anything less agile than a mountain goat. The rock on which the fortress is built is itself a wonder, jutting boldly forth as it does from the mountain side, and it cannot fail of producing feelings of admiration for the bold man who had the courage to fix upon such a spot for the construction of his stronghold, and the perseverance to convey materials to such an eagle's nest to complete it.

Such being the position of this once celebrated state prison, to which a practicable road must have been originally made from the neighbouring town with considerable labour and difficulty—such being the nature of its position, let any one imagine what sort of work it must be to get up to it by means of a short zig-zag cut very nearly up the front of the cliff! This feat I had to perform before breakfast, and on a morning, too, already beginning to be "pretty considerably" hot; so that I certainly remember my approach to this renowned state prison with no great wish to reach it again in the same way. I consider it

as a matter of conscience to describe this wild and beautiful path faithfully, because the entrance upon it is of a very beguiling character, looking gently upward, with a tree or two arching over it very charmingly for a yard or two, and altogether tempting the unwary wanderer to leave the unpicturesque comfort of a carriage for a heavenward ramble, which will cost him, however, many "winded suspirations of forced breath" ere he reaches the end of it.

But having thus honourably and conscientiously performed my duty as a guide, and said quite enough to prevent the footsteps of dainty and delicate travellers from entering upon an enterprise which would be likely enough to prove anything but agreeable to them, the same spirit of truth induces me to encourage those who are stout and stalwart, and light of foot withal, to pay no attention whatever to any word I have said against this said short cut to the castle of Miolans, for to all such it would prove delightful from the first step to the last. Even to me, fasting

and fagged as I was, I never paused to take breath without being ready to acknowledge that the magnificent landscape, growing wider and wider at every step we took, was enough to repay a greater labour. At last we reached the bit of table land on which the fortress stands, and to this, by some means or other, I do most strongly advise all manner of persons to attain, who have eyes formed after the fashion alluded to some pages ago—that is to say, eyes gifted with the (not universal) power of knowing what is beautiful when they see it.

It is easy enough to account for the delight such eyes convey to their possessors on beholding a fine landscape, but whence arises that delight, if possible, more pungent still, produced by gazing on the iron strength of the dark towers of Miolans, so sternly gloomy, so universally desolate, so fearfully eloquent, even in decay—of hopeless suffering, and of violence beyond the reach of witness or control? I could easily enough fancy the spirit of Blue Beard, or of a thorough-bred ogre, thrown into

a perfect ecstasy of delight at sight of those enormous towers, reared on the very edge of the unscaleable rock, so aptly formed to sustain them, each one large enough to contain a hundred wives, dead or alive, or a larder of a thousand innocents, while every feature, from the dungeon keep to the portcullis, seems to speak alike of strength and of concealment.

But why such peaceably-minded individuals as my companion and myself should look upon this stern, dark object, with such exceeding satisfaction, I am a good deal at a loss to comprehend. Yet so it was. We sat down upon a beautiful morsel of soft turf, as green as if it had been growing upon the Emerald Isle instead of upon a rock in Savoy; and stranger still, we sat too under the shelter of a chestnut tree, as rich and flourishing as if it had been born and bred in Spain; and there I truly believe that we both of us as completely forgot that we had not breakfasted as if the vulgar necessities of eating and drinking made no part of our sublime natures. There we sat, and confessed to each other that the most glo-

rious palace in the world, with all the grace of architecture, and all the splendour of royal occupation, would fail to delight us as we were then delighted by those black, mouldering walls. The back-ground against which they reared themselves was indeed as bright a field of heaven's own blue as ever was seen by an untravelled tramontane, and the rich expanse which seemed to stretch with a servile submission at its feet, as if bringing its subject treasures as an offering to its indomitable strength, was most marvellously fair to look upon.

Yet it was not from all this beauty that it derived its charm. On the contrary, we should probably have been more enraptured still had the rock on which the splendid ruin stood overhung a raging ocean, or a cataract as horrifically grand as Niagara. I cannot remember, among all the multitude of ruins which I have visited, any collections of walls, arches, and buttresses in which there exists such various materials for existing feelings of, not exactly terror, but a poetic approach to it, as the castle of Miolans. Yet it is probable

that the strange effect I am attempting to describe was more the result of a foolish adventure which befel us there, than of the more usual aspect of the place; although no one, I presume, would venture to deny that the colour, form, and position of this portentous-looking mass of stones have, when seen under the most ordinary circumstances, an air of gloomy severity, which cannot be contemplated with indifference. This adventure was, as I have said, a foolish one, and if I recount it for the use and benefit of scramblers and climbers in general, and for those in particular who happen to visit the castle of Miolans, it ought to be received as a very magnanimous proof of benevolence.

After having sat on the green sward long enough to recover from the heat and fatigue of the ascent, we entered one of a nest of little cottages which seem to have grown up, it is difficult to guess how or why, behind the ruined fortress, and inquired of a woman whom we found there, if we could be admitted into the interior of the ruin, the unassisted access

to which was prevented by an enormous gate of solid oak. The reply was more civil than satisfactory, as it informed us that we should be perfectly welcome to go in, but that her husband, who always kept the keys of the castle, was gone to the fair at Albigny, and that, till he returned, all access to it was impossible. She added, that we should be sure to see him back in about a couple of hours or so, and might sit down, if we pleased, during the interval.

Now before our embarrassment at hearing this could be justly appreciated, it would be necessary to comprehend both the vehemence of our wishes for breakfast, and likewise for seeing the interior of the ruin; both of which sensations, being in intensity considerably beyond the ordinary average of human emotions, cannot by any means be easily described. As to sitting down in the good woman's hot little cottage, that was not a part of the business likely to trouble us, as our thanks for the offer were easily returned; and, without uttering any definitive decision about waiting, or not waiting, we

moved off towards the ruin, to find out how far we could go, and how much we could see without the assistance of the keys. It was impossible to have devised any project *less* likely to set our troubled spirits to rest, and prepare us for walking contentedly down the long gradual descent which led to Albigny and breakfast. Anything more provocative to curiosity than the peeps we got by clambering up to loopholes, and applying our longing eyes to the huge keyhole of the gates, cannot well be imagined.

The most remarkable feature of this fine old building is the boldness with which the mighty towers which flank the side that fronts the valley, rise from the very extremest edge of the perpendicular rock. It is impossible to imagine a site more daring or more picturesque, and our peeping shewed us exactly enough of this to convince us that it would be a very heart-breaking business indeed to depart without seeing more of it. But like all other keys used to lock up particular portions of ruined castles, those which were now

jingling in the dissipated warder's pocket, through the fair at Albigny, were absolutely necessary for our admittance to the point which we were exactly most anxious to reach. My companion left me for a few moments in order to examine the crumbling walls in all directions, not without hope that their falling condition might at some point or other defy the necessity of keys, and thus give us the power of penetrating to the inner court by only paying the penalty of a scramble. In short space he returned.

"I think," said he, "that I could manage to get in without much difficulty, and so might you too, if you would trust to me, and not take fright lest I should let go your hand, and so suffer you to tumble over the precipice."

The truth is, and that my companion well knew, that the particular mode of destruction arising from falling over a precipice is the one, *par excellence*, for which I feel the least predilection, and for an extremely good reason—namely, that, like cowardice, it makes one die many deaths instead of one, by means of the

horrible vertigo which the mere sight of the danger is sure to occasion.

"I am quite willing to trust you," I replied, "and I cannot imagine there can be any danger of falling over the precipice, inasmuch as we cannot even see it before we are actually in the interior court."

"There certainly is no danger," said he, "if you will trust to me, and not think about the precipice. Come with me, and I will show you a place where we can easily get in."

I followed him accordingly, and after a few twistings and turnings among the old walls we reached a spot at the further side of the building from that by which we had approached it, and found it looking more like a rich meadow than a bare rock, with good herbage, and abundance of fine chestnut trees. We stood here, on the verge of a steep hill, and looked down from it on the distant valley below; nevertheless, there was nothing in the least degree approaching a precipice, for the majestic crag on which the castle stands is most singularly isolated, and looks as if it had

been flung out from the grassy hill's side by the action of a volcano. I looked down very complacently over the sunny slope, and sagely observed, that although it was very steep, I did not consider walking on the edge of it as at all dangerous; which pithy remark was elicited by my perceiving that, having reached this edge, my companion was leading me back again along its extreme verge, though wherefore I knew not, for the stern black wall of one of the towers reared its impenetrable surface before us, pierced by no visible ingress of any sort, save a window high above our heads.

"There is nothing very terrible," I repeated, "here; but how are we to get on? There does not appear to me to be a single inch to stand upon beyond the walls of this gigantic tower."

"Wait a moment," was the reply, and on we went to within a foot or two of the building. "Now, then, observe," said my companion; "it is evident that many a step has passed this way; do you not perceive three

regular steps? These will take us in perfect safety to a breach by which we can enter as easily as by the great gates."

And as he spoke, he performed the feat he proposed, disappearing for an instant, and returning again immediately. It is by no means easy to describe the spot so as to render the proposed manœuvre intelligible; but the most important feature in it to my eyes, was a good thick bush of furzebrake or underwood, which effectually masked the horror of the precipice at the point where the footsteps were visible; and, well knowing the trustworthy arm I had to assist me, I boldly stepped forward, and in another moment, by the help of the said arm in making one somewhat steep upward step, I found myself precisely on the spot where we wished to be.

I will not now pause to describe any of the gratification which ensued from looking down from various "points of vantage," attained with no great difficulty or danger, upon the noble landscape below us, but proceed to tell

what our condition was, when, this pleasure having been enjoyed, was past and over.

"Now, then!" said I, having looked about sufficiently to assure myself that I had left nothing very remarkable unseen—"now then, let us get out again, and gallop down the hill as fast as we can to breakfast."

And, arm in arm, we approached the place by which we had entered; but—

"Oh! the heavy change!"

not indeed that in reality any change had taken place in the locality, for to the best of my knowledge and belief we had not displaced a single pebble by our entrance; nevertheless, the difference seemed to me as great as that between looking down an easy staircase, with every broad step carpeted, and inviting you to use it, and looking down the space occupied by the said commodious staircase, every step thereof being maliciously removed! But here again description fails me, and I can only say it was so, without being able to convey in words such a picture of the ground as to make

this change conceivable. The most important describable point of difference was the absence of the bush which had been immediately before me when I had to make the first downward step. This may be understood by those who share my unhappy propensity to vertigo, but will, I suspect, be perfectly unintelligible to those who do not. It was, however, quite sufficient to make the operation of returning by the same way we came, a matter of total and complete impossibility to me. It was in vain that my stronger-headed companion pointed out to me the undeniable fact that the same morsel of level earth which had supported my feet as I came up, might support my feet as I came down. This was a point which I did not attempt to dispute with him, nevertheless it was utterly beyond my power to profit by the conviction he enforced, and in truth he knew my infirmity too well to urge me very strongly, confessing that the first downward step which it was now necessary to take, in order to escape from this awful stronghold, *did* certainly require a firm foot and

steady hand to perform it safely; and I had the great comfort of perceiving that he had evidently no inclination to attempt the adventure, unless it were entered upon with free will and unflinching courage on my part. But the perceiving this was pretty nearly my *only* comfort, for anything more utterly helpless and forlorn than our situation can hardly be imagined. What was to be done next?

"Let us," said I, "go round the walls, and carefully examine every part of them; perhaps we may find some point at which it might be possible for me to climb over them."

"You forget their height on the other side," he replied. "So much rubbish from the ruins of the interior have fallen here, that it is likely enough we might find many points at which you might reach the top of the wall on this side—the difficulty will be how to get down on the other."

"But let us at least examine every part of the enclosure," said I. And we set off accordingly, pausing at every spot that offered the slightest hope of affording a practicable

exit, but finding ourselves obliged to abandon all in succession, from observing that however possible it might be to get up, it would be by far too desperate an undertaking to attempt getting down. Alas! how little did we then care for all the curious architectural intricacies that our minute examinations brought to view! Neither traces of little staircases in the thickness of the wall, nor the low-browed arches now filled up with rubbish, which, questionless, once led to awful dungeons; no, nor even the stumbling over the weed-covered, rusty ring of an unmistakable trap-door, could move us farther. Considerably lowered in strength both by fatigue and fasting, I felt what is commonly called nervous, which means that all my ordinary courage and power of exertion seemed perfectly gone, and I was so completely "a coward in my own esteem," that I felt before our search was ended as if it would be infinitely better to lie down and go to sleep, than give myself any farther trouble in seeking the means of either creeping or climbing out of the prison I had so unwisely got into.

Just as I had reached this very deplorable epoch in my existence, and while, heavily hanging on my companion's arm, I was dragging my weary, hopeless steps towards a dark angle of the building which we had not yet explored, we suddenly came upon a human being whom we seemed to startle quite as much as he startled us. This odd-looking fellow-creature, whose presence, notwithstanding his very peculiar ugliness, we should have gladly welcomed if he would have let us, was a most ungainly-looking boy or dwarf, I really know not which, who, if the former, might from his size be about twelve or thirteen years of age. His occupation, considering the spot on which we found him, was queer enough. He was seated on the ground in a dark, dank corner of the ruin, with a villanously dirty fragment of linen upon his knees, into which he was counting what seemed to be a pretty large collection of copper, and small silver coins. I certainly started on seeing him; for the apparition was equally ugly and unexpected, becoming visible to us

as we turned round the projecting corner of a tower; but my start was nothing in comparison to his.

I shall not easily forget the look of dismay which took possession of his hideous features as he caught sight of us; but he was upon his legs in a moment, and darting round another corner of the old walls, was out of sight with a degree of rapidity that seemed to me rather spiritlike and alarming. My companion, however, darted after him, hallooing to him lustily to stop, but it was all in vain. He was gone, vanished either into thin air or thick stone, for nothing else remained visible to our eyes, neither could we discern any possible means by which he could have made his exit. There was too much of disagreeable reality, however, in the dilemma in which we found ourselves, to leave us any imagination to dream of sprites and hobgoblins; and having, by the departure of this extraordinary-looking personage, lost the hope of escape which his appearance within the walls of our prison had inspired, it occurred to us both at the same

moment that we must find it again in the fact that *he* had certainly found means to get out, and therefore that we might do so likewise.

"Where he is gone, we can follow," I exclaimed.

"I should hope so," replied my companion, "for sure am I that he has not climbed over the walls; he could not have done so without our seeing him."

This inference, from the position of the ground on which we stood, seemed very clear; for the fugitive must have crossed an open space in some direction to have reached them. But what then had become of him? Nothing less than the accomplished science of the nineteenth century could have inspired the confidence we felt of his not being formed of less solid materials than flesh and blood. But as it was, this confidence was enough to make us deem it worth while to examine every crack and cranny of the massive barrier which enclosed us, in the hope of finding some neglected breach in it which might serve our purpose.

"Sit you down here," said my companion,

pointing to a fallen stone, conveniently backed by a fragment of masonry, which sheltered it from the brilliant sunshine, "sit you here, and let me have a hunt."

This interval of rest was extremely welcome to me, and my patience under the delay that followed was by no means exhausted, when my fellow-prisoner returned to me. The moment I saw his face I was convinced that he had been successful, and in a manner from which he had evidently found amusement as well as release, for he was laughing. The adventure, nevertheless, did not appear to have ended altogether without danger, for he had his handkerchief wrapped about his hand, as it might have been had he received a sabre-cut thereon. His countenance, however, prevented any serious alarm.

"It is all right now," said he. "I made rather a hasty plunge into some brambles, and have got scratched a little, but I have broken a very respectable-looking sally-port through them now, so you have nothing to fear."

That I lost no time in following him may

be easily believed; and, having scrambled over a little rough ground, covered with fragments of masonry and rank weeds, I found myself in front of what appeared to me the very highest and most inaccessible wall of the whole enclosure. I looked up at it with dismay.

"You must look down, and not up," said my guide; and thus instructed, I did look down, but perceived nothing but an extremely thickly-tangled mass of brambles, which rose to the height of five or six feet against the wall.

"But I see no sally-port," said I.

"Patience," he replied; and, taking my hand while he twisted round the corner of the bush, he placed me on the top of three or four very dilapidated steps, that appeared to terminate in a low arch, by no means inviting in appearance; for, whatever was beyond it, though not in total darkness, was too obscure to be fairly judged of as a place of refuge. The top of the steps was still a good deal encumbered and partially concealed by brambles, but they had been sufficiently removed to leave a practicable exit.

"But where does that dark arch lead to?' said I.

"To breakfast," was the prompt reply; and on hearing it, I felt that neither darkness, nor dust, nor thickets, nor thorns, could stop me, and boldly making the first downward plunge I presently found myself in what must once have been a reservoir for water, but it was now perfectly dry; and scrambling up again on the opposite side of it, we perceived that we were still within the original enclosure of the castle, though happily beyond the barrier intended to be kept sacred by the keys of the great gates. And, truth to say, no very heavy charge of carelessness lies against the guardian who, as it seems, so carefully keeps these keys in his pocket; for neither the entrance nor the exit which we had discovered for ourselves were of a nature sufficiently tempting to endanger his losing many sous by neglecting them. As to the exit, indeed, I think it must require necessity as sharp as our own to lead either to its discovery or its use; and as to the entrance, I would assuredly re-

commend it to no one, young or old, male or female, who is not conscious of a head and a foot as steady and as firm as those of a chamois hunter.

As to the dirty little miser, to whom we probably owed the discovery of the friendly cistern, we saw him twice afterwards, once on the road, and once in the fair, through which we subsequently passed in the carriage. Whether his riches had been accumulated by begging, stealing, or the long and careful hoarding of the wages of his youthful labour, we had no means of deciding, but of the three, the last seemed to us by much the least probable.

And did we not trot briskly and merrily down the beautiful though somewhat long road which led to St. Pierre d'Albigny? and did not the increased enjoyment both of rest and refreshment atone for the want of both? and is there any pleasure that can be enjoyed *au mieux* without previous privation? The moral of my tale is, therefore, twofold; first, never get into a prison if you can help it,

without knowing how you can get out; secondly, never grumble at a long walk before breakfast when you are quite sure of getting good coffee and rolls at the end of it.

* * * * * *

The whole drive from St. Pierre d'Albigny to Chambery, which occupied the latter part of this varied day, is most superb. We passed immediately under that tremendous Mont Grenier, a portion of which, in the thirteenth century, fell and destroyed a town and sixteen villages. The part of the rock from which this awful mass was precipitated may still be distinguished.

THE STORY OF A SHAWL.

THE STORY OF A SHAWL.

It is now several years ago that a friend of mine, who knew my propensity to story-telling, recounted to me an anecdote, which he assured me was related to him as a fact, and in such a manner as to lead him fully to believe that it was so. Since that time I have visited the locality where the circumstance is said to have occurred, and when I say that this locality is Venice, the reader will understand perhaps how it has happened that what slept in my memory before, has awakened now. The principal incident of the tale shall be faithfully given as I received it; but some

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minor circumstances I shall take the liberty to alter.

"L'histoire précise," says a modern French poet, "tue le fleur de l'emotion," which morsel of sublimity I quote, in order to excuse my want of scrupulous exactness.

It is now, I believe, a good many years ago, that an English minister from the court of the King of England to that of the Doge of Venice, being unfortunately a widower, invited his sister to accompany him on his mission, and to take upon herself the management of his household, in his remote but splendid home. No proposal could have been better timed, or more agreeable; for the lady had also been deprived by death of her wedded partner, and being left with a daughter, and very little means of providing for her, could not but feel that the invitation was to be gratefully accepted.

By all accounts, Mrs. de Courtenay—such was the name of Lord Pentegrot's sister—had other motives, besides her wish of providing for her daughter, which made the offered posi-

tion in his excellency's household peculiarly agreeable. She was herself still young enough to be extremely lovely—an advantage which few women ever valued more, and which none could study more diligently to preserve. To do this effectually, or in fact, to any good purpose, was totally beyond her power, in her dull little mansion in Somersetshire; but all the capabilities offered by a splendid diplomatic position at Venice rushed upon her imagination at once, as she read the welcome letter of her brother, and her only difficulty in replying to it consisted in the necessity of not expressing all the rapture she felt, lest the ambassadorial dignity of the Lord Pentegrot might take alarm, from the too sincere expression of her feelings. But she escaped this danger admirably, and her acceptance was conveyed in such a style, that his lordship considered himself as especially fortunate in having such a sister to accompany him.

In making this proposal, Lord Pentegrot was quite aware that he was taking upon himself a rather expensive charge; for he knew

that the paltry little jointure of his sister would by no means suffice to supply both her and her daughter, (already fifteen years of age,) with what would be absolutely necessary for their suitable appearance among the ever splendid diplomatic corps of Europe. But, in the first place, he had no child himself, and he therefore thought that, although by no means rich, he might venture to hazard the undertaking, especially as he should always have the power to regulate the personal expenses of the two ladies according to his own will and pleasure; and, in the next, his young niece Clara was, next to himself, the thing he liked best in the world, and therefore the having her always near him appeared worth all the ducats he proposed to expend upon her.

The Lord Pentegrot's arrival at the palace prepared for him at one of the noblest points of the grand canal, was altogether in very good style. No man loved pomp and magnificence better than the Lord Pentegrot, and he was happy in a vocation which enabled him to indulge in this, chiefly at the expense either of

the nation who sent, or the nation who received him.

Venice was at that time in all her glory, and the capacious lungs of the Lord Pentegrot seemed to expand themselves with more than usual vigour, as he walked, followed by his sister and his niece, through the eight superb state-rooms which the gorgeous republic had ordered to be prepared for him. He was a proud man before he reached his palace at Venice, but he was a prouder one still afterwards; and he would have considered it as a crime, partaking of the nature of suicide, had he permitted any motives of economy to interfere with the display of the magnificence with which he felt himself identified. And so the fêtes given by the Lord Pentegrot and his beautiful sister were among the most splendid in Venice; and there was no mansion for the *entrée* to which more intrigues were set on foot, by those who did not command the *entrée* by right.

Lord Pentegrot was proud of his sister, and well he might be, for not the noblest lady in

Venice had more beauty to display, or better knew how to set that beauty off to advantage. It is true—alas! it was too true for Mrs. de Courtenay's peace of mind—that many ladies were more gorgeously attired; but as yet she had managed admirably well, by means of displaying in succession the half dozen rich and stately dresses with which her brother had presented her, as a suitable outfit upon her leaving England.

These were all admirably well chosen; for the beautiful woman had chosen them herself, and no one knew better than Mrs. de Courtenay what would best suit the exquisite *contour* of her majestic form. But by degrees the gnawing misery arose, of perceiving that, whereas her six robes appeared again and again, those of other ladies were as various as their humours, and outdid the rainbow in variety of tint, and the *bijouterie* of Neptune's most sacred cave in splendour of decoration. It was in vain that she expended every sequin she could extract from her brother in sundry subsidiary little ornaments and trimmings; the

solid sub-stratum of brocaded silk remained the same, till her fair cheeks blushed as she looked upon it. She hinted to the ambassador the melancholy truth; but, with all the politeness of a practised courtier, he assured her that she was quite mistaken in supposing that her appearance was in any degree inferior to that of the ladies, her friends; for that he had the satisfaction of assuring her that there was not one among them all who was so universally admired as herself.

"Besides," he added, whispering confidentially in her ear, "if it were otherwise, I have not the power of doing anything more in the way of dress for you at present. The rich silks I bought for you and for Clara in the city of London, made no inconsiderable inroad into my very moderate stock of ready money; and that last entertainment I gave to the Doge has almost made a bankrupt of me."

Another word would be dangerous. Mrs. de Courtenay knew this, and uttered none. But in this speech of her brother's, there was one phrase that awakened a perfectly new idea

in her mind—"The rich silks I bought for you *and for Clara.*" True, most true; he had bought rich silks for Clara, and these remained still in the safely-packed rolls in which they had been sent home by the merchant. For to say truth, Mrs. de Courtenay was by no means impatient that her daughter should appear in silks and satins. As yet, she had never been permitted to appear in public at all, and the slight and delicate fabric of the Indian looms, as white as her own beautiful skin, formed the robes in which she was presented to such intimate acquaintance as occasionally visited at the embassy in private.

"Why should those silks lie idle?" was the mental exclamation of Mrs. de Courtenay, as her brother walked off to his audience chamber. "What folly! Nay, ten times worse than folly,—what extravagance! They may all be injured, moth-worn, ruined before the child is strong enough to stand under the weight of a brocaded gown."

To put in practice the project which grew out of these meditations, required no consulta-

tion with any one. Clara knew no more of the silks in her mother's cabinets than of the cups in the butler's pantry, and therefore there was no need to trouble her. And as to Lord Pentegrot, though certainly he had himself chosen the delicate colours which he intended for the use of his beautiful niece, it was not very likely that he would remember much about it; and even if he did, the delicate attention to his convenience which she evinced in having recourse to this expedient, instead of again applying to him in the pressing necessity occasioned by the approaching carnival, must obtain not only his forgiveness, but his thanks. And the carnival came and found Mrs. de Courtenay ready to take her place at every fête, not only among the most lovely, but among the most elegantly dressed of the Venetian dames. It is true that the colours and devices of her beautiful brocades were very youthfully gay and delicate; for Lord Pentegrot, who had chosen them, had an excellent taste, and knew well what would become the exquisite fairness of Clara. But this

mattered not. The mother was very nearly as fair as the daughter, and as the silks were of the richest, she felt in no way disposed to find fault with them.

Meanwhile the young Clara, who had been hitherto considered as a mere child, was improving in loveliness with every passing day. Lord Pentegrot having long ago decided in his own mind that she was probably the very prettiest girl that ever was born, and that when she was presented to the world, she would infallibly be sought in marriage by many distinguished personages, gave himself no trouble as to the fitting time for such presentation, feeling very perfect confidence in the knowledge of his sister upon such subjects, and certain that, when the proper season arrived, the proper steps would be taken. Perhaps he did his beautiful sister but justice in attributing this knowledge to her; but he blundered when he supposed that knowing what is right, is equivalent to doing it. As Mrs. de Courtenay looked at the perfect form and beaming face of her lovely daughter, she

became fully aware that the moment she appeared, she herself would cease to be accounted the most beautiful woman in Venice.

This consideration rendered the idea of introducing Clara extremely painful, and the lady determined to put it off as long as possible. The little affair of the silk dresses, too, rendered this postponement highly desirable; and therefore when the Lord Pentegrot ventured to say, a day or two before the carnival began—

"Do you not think, sister, that Clara may now be permitted to join in some of the amusements of the season?" Mrs. de Courtenay answered very decisively—

"No, my lord, I certainly think not. She can hardly be considered as fully grown yet, having but just passed her sixteenth birthday."

"Her height appears to me exactly what it ought to be," replied the ambassador; "however, of course you must know best. I should wish, nevertheless, if you please, that the dear child should be permitted to see the grand

procession from the Doge's palace to St. Mark's. She need not be seen herself, you know; she shall not be in a state gondola, but merely be permitted to occupy, with her good Alice, a common gondola, with curtains drawn."

Now Mrs. de Courtenay knew perfectly well that when his excellency condescended to say, "If you please," it was a signal that she had better make no further difficulties in complying with any wish he might have expressed, and she accordingly replied—

"Oh! certainly, my lord! There can be no objection to that."

Clara and her good Alice, too, were almost wild with joy, when informed that they were to be indulged with the use of a gondola, on the grand canal, on the day of the great procession.

In describing a fête at Venice, nobody ever says, "the weather was beautiful." The weather is always beautiful, and though the festive season arrives at a period of the year when more northern skies are dim, and tramontane winds blow cold, yet there the gliding gondola

cuts the wave with the same gentle security in winter as in summer, for the usual features of winter are almost as little known to the denizens of that magic city, as the features of spring. So we must not say, by way of decorating the description of Clara's first introduction to a carnival fête, that the weather was beautiful. Of course, it was beautiful, and everything else was beautiful too, and herself more beautiful than all the rest.

And was it possible that Clara and her indulgent attendant should find themselves in the midst of such a blaze of gallant braveries, and yet never so far transgress the commands of Mrs. de Courtenay, as to be at some short moments visible themselves? It was not possible; but the apparition of good Mrs. Alice's quiet little round face was attended with no disagreeable result whatever, and she grew bolder and bolder, and the sable curtains were drawn back farther and farther; but it was Mrs. Alice's hand that did it, and so Clara thought there could be no harm in looking out.

And what is that brilliant thing that floats upon the wave with such surpassing splendour, and yet seems from its position to be but among the lookers on, making no part of the grand procession to St. Mark's?

"See, Alice!—see! It is covered with silver crescents, and with crimson flags! Oh, me! how beautiful!"

"And what a pair of staring eyes are there!" said Alice, hastily closing the dark curtains.

Clara, athwart the licensed aperture of the little window-blind, looked out again, and then she too saw the tremendous eyes that seemed to shine as if a living fire were within them; and though the eyes could see her no longer, they were fixed upon her gondola, and with an eagerness and curiosity that almost frightened her, especially when she perceived that they shone from beneath the rich turban of an infidel. It was one of those rare and brief intervals of peace between the Porte and Venice, which permitted the approach of a Turkish ambassador to the footstool of the

Ocean Queen; and the eyes that had so intently gazed upon Clara, were, in fact, no other than those of that illustrious functionary himself. In the next moment, the ears both of the young lady and her attendant were aware of some half-whispered words at the prow of their boat, and Alice, peeping out, perceived that a small, unornamented gondola —unornamented save by a silver crescent at the prow—had drove close to them, and that a man on board her was conversing with one of their own boatmen.

"Let us go home, Alice, now. There is no pleasure in being shut up thus, and seeing nothing," said Clara.

"Well, then, my treasure, we *will* go home," replied Alice, who began to think that they had both seen, and been seen, enough.

Hafiz Pacha, the ambassador from the Porte to Venice, had indeed seen Clara de Courtenay, and was quite ready to swear by Mahommed that he had never seen, even in his dreams, anything one thousandth part so beautiful before.

Having by prompt measures ascertained the name and station of the young beauty, which he would have been better pleased to have found more obscure, he too withdrew himself from the gorgeous spectacle upon the grand canal, and was speedily seated among cushions, and inhaling the vapour of roses, as he meditated on the best mode of seeing her again.

It is not the custom among Turks to make love by long preliminary agreeability, but Hafiz Pacha was conscious that he possessed many advantages over Turks in general, and he felt the movement of a new ambition within him, leading him to think that it would be exceedingly agreeable to imitate in this instance the manners of the young nobles, (young and old, too, perhaps) whom he saw fluttering round the beauties of the court, and whom he sometimes thought were wasting their time very ridiculously. But just at present he thought differently. He was excessively, and, all things considered, justly proud of having learnt to express himself intelligibly in French, and he suddenly thought that he

should like nothing better than making Mademoiselle de Courtenay think him the most agreeable man in Venice. And Hafiz Pacha really was very agreeable, for a Turk, and had become quite intimate and familiar with several gay gentlemen of the society of Venice.

There was one young man, the son of the French ambassador, who took particular pleasure in his company; and it was not possible for a Turk and a Christian to be better friends. To this young Frenchman Hafiz Pacha addressed himself, as soon as the religious ceremonies of the day were over, and, relating his adventure, asked him how it happened that so accomplished a beauty, and one too of such distinguished rank, had never made her appearance at court.

"I will bet fifty louis-d'ors to a sou," replied the young man, "that it is because her handsome mother is jealous of her."

"How?" exclaimed the sensible Mussulman, "an old lady jealous of her own daughter?"

"Take care you do not let the old lady in

question hear you, my beloved Pacha, or you will stand an exceedingly poor chance of ever getting another sight of the young one. However, if you will be discreet, I will do my best, both for your sake and my own, to hasten the rising of this beauteous star above the horizon of childhood."

This was uttered with all the graceful vivacity of a young Frenchman of high condition, confident in his own influence of all kinds. For the Duc de Fredonaielle, the father of the Pacha's young friend, was a powerful nobleman, with sufficient influence at home to make him important abroad; and in Lord Pentegrot's opinion especially, the young man appeared deserving of all deference and attention, from being the son of a nobleman to whom he had just lost five hundred crowns without the power of paying one, and upon whose *bonhommie* he depended, for such patience in settling the account as might save him from exposure in the supercilious eyes of the rich Venetians.

When the young de Fredonaielle appeared

before him, therefore, with a respectful but animated request, that he might be the first person permitted to dance with the young beauty, his excellency's niece, whose appearance at the balls of the festive season just commencing was ardently hoped for by all the court, Lord Pentegrot listened with a gracious ear, not only pleased at an opportunity of obliging the son and heir of his right good friend and brother diplomat, but with a slight touch of hope that his young niece, whom, in the midst of all his embarrassments, he really loved exceedingly, might, by possibility, become some day Duchesse de Fredonaielle. In short, the excellent Ambassador of England at length took the affair into his own hands, and, without a word of explanation as to his motives, informed his sister that "*if she pleased*," it was his wish that Clara should be immediately presented at court, and subsequently make her appearance at all the festivities of the carnival.

It boots not to dilate on the feelings of Mrs. de Courtenay at receiving this intimation;

suffice it to say, that she too had her own little embarrassments, and that the possibility her brother might take it into his head, that if she were disobliging, she might as well be in England as in Venice, which of all things would have been the most inconvenient to her, was sufficient to overcome all her dislike to the proceeding, and her consent was signified with the best grace imaginable, accompanied, however, with a petition that she might be permitted to dress her fair daughter with the elegant simplicity suitable to her tender years, declaring that the effect of her juvenile beauty would be destroyed were she to be loaded with the heavy splendour which was the fashion of the day.

On this point the Lord Pentegrot gave the accomplished lady *carte blanche*, being perfectly aware that her taste in all matters connected with the toilet was unimpeachable. And thus, to her equal surprise and delight, the young Clara was informed that she was to accompany her mother and uncle to the splendid fête about to be given at the Doge's palace.

Little did the happy Clara, or her faithful Alice either, suspect that this sudden influx of happiness was owing to the prodigiously bright eyes that had flashed upon her from under a turban. (Red caps, with blue tassels, had not as yet displaced the graceful head-gear of the Mussulman.)

The young de Fredonaielle explained to his friend the Turk, that the only way in his power to obtain the release of Mademoiselle de Courtenay from the nursery, was by asking her to dance, and therefore his excellency must not take it amiss that in the first instance, he was himself to profit by his successful negotiation; but at the same time he hinted to his turbaned friend, that by far the surest way of obtaining permission to approach the daughter, would be by propitiating the favour of the mother; and he strongly advised the majestic representative of the Porte to devote himself entirely to Madame de Courtenay, while her daughter was engaged in dancing.

It may be doubted whether such an arrangement would have been altogether satisfactory,

in any other instance, to a gentleman so violently in love as Hafiz Pacha; but he was perfectly aware of the fact that Turkish ambassadors never do dance; so he pressed the hand of his young friend in European fashion, and bent his head in his own, in token of his being well contented with all he had done.

The evening of the fête arrived. The matchless palace of the Doge blazed with light, which not even the sombre magnificence of Tintoret could conquer. Room after room was traversed by the astonished Clara, with an ecstasy that almost made her fancy she was treading on air, and advancing towards the gates of Paradise through vestibules and anterooms worthy of leading to it. At length, the hall of halls was reached. More experienced eyes than those of Clara can hardly look round that almost awfully majestic chamber, even now, and not quail in some sort before the boldness of human genius, that dared to inclose and adorn so vast an area, and then call it a room. No wonder, then, that the lovely novice lost all self-possession, as she beheld it

blazing with unnumbered tapers, which the sparkling jewels of the brilliant, but pigmy-looking crowd that spread over the floor, reflected in undulating waves of many-coloured light.

This sort of ardent admiration of any object, or objects, that the eye beholds, is rarely graceful or becoming in the old, but suits well with the newness of young life, and while Clara was wrapt in delight as she gazed upon the glittering mass, each individual of it who was fortunate enough to get a sight of her gazed upon her with rapture in return. As to the Turk, who, from the elevated estrade occupied by the diplomatic corps, was enabled to watch her as she was led to the immediate presence of the sovereign, he almost began to suspect that a miracle had been wrought in his favour, and that it was an immortal houri, and nothing less, that bloomed before his eyes.

At that moment he would have given a good deal to have made it the custom for Turkish ambassadors to dance; but the thing was impossible, so he wisely determined to

abide by the counsel of his young friend, and devote himself altogether to winning the good graces of the young girl's mother.

That much-admired lady had never been in better humour to receive homage, both from Turk and Christian, than at that moment. It had been in fear and trembling that she had given orders for the perpetration of Clara's simple toilet. She saw plainly enough that something was going wrong in the financial department of the Lord Pentegrot, and would no more have ventured to confess what had been done with the silks and satins he had provided for his niece, than to have asked the Doge to lend her his cap. But woman's wit and woman's taste helped her effectually out of the dilemma.

It happily struck her that if Clara could not be made to look like a woman of fashion, it was by no means impossible to make her look like an angel of light; and instead of committing the folly of vainly attempting to render her appearance brilliant, she devoted herself to the more hopeful task of making it

almost pastoral in its simplicity. It is very certain that a beautiful young girl looks beautiful in anything; and past numbering are the mistakes which people make in fancying that the form and colour of the garments they wear have a power of communicating beauty: and many a deep-drawn sigh has doubtless followed the discovery of the blunder. But, nevertheless, it will sometimes happen that a pretty caprice, a graceful whim, a piquant singularity, will arouse the attention of the spectator, and make him feel, with increased sensibility, the loveliness that is before him. So was it in the case of Clara.

An audible murmur of admiration ran round the circle that surrounded the Doge, as she appeared to offer her pretty homage, and many favourable thoughts concerning snow-white muslin stole into bosoms bucklered in stiff brocade.

This success was fortunate, in more ways than one, in its power of soothing the feelings of Mrs. de Courtenay; for not only did it remove all fear of an inquiry after the silks

and satins, but it tempted her to hope that the unmistakeable admiration excited by the appearance of Clara, arose more from the well-fancied peculiarity of her dress, than from any alarming superiority in her beauty. And Mrs. de Courtenay was quite right. Her daughter was really not at all handsomer than herself, but she was younger. This tiresome reflection, however, did not happen to occur to her, and Mrs. de Courtenay continued in a state of great enjoyment; for not only did the Turk remain seated at her side with an air of devotion that seemed nearly approaching adoration, but very many other noble individuals appeared to be newly awakened to the power of her charms, and of all the ladies of that splendid circle she evidently reigned supreme.

But, alas! the happiness of mortals is doomed to be ever transitory! Scarcely had Mrs. de Courtenay felt in its full extent the dear delight of being *first*, than a sudden cloud seemed to pass over her greatness, threatening it with a chilling eclipse!

In the days that have been, as in the days

that are, the women of all the nations of the earth have been justly sensible of the surpassing beauty of the product of the Cashmere looms. Nay, not the women only, but even the manly eyes of many a gallant knight and gentleman have rested with admiration on the graceful *litheness* of a Cashmere shawl. What man that loves, or even admires a woman, but has pleasure in throwing the soft, clinging folds of the matchless fabric around her? Light as air, yet warm as the tender down that envelopes the swan; radiant in colouring, yet, by some strange mystery of art, defying safely all danger of coarse and gaudy effect; seeming to shelter the form it covers from every eye, yet betraying its contour with a grace that no transparent gauze could ever equal,—can we wonder that, with all these claims upon the affection of the female heart, it reigns unrivalled there, above all the other textures of the earth?

It chanced that, on the night of Clara's presentation, a certain Marchesa Albadoro, whose immense wealth gave her a very dis-

agreeable sort of pre-eminence in the eyes of Mrs. de Courtenay, appeared in the circle with such a Cashmere shawl twisted round her as had never been seen at Venice, save once upon the person of Hafiz Pacha himself, upon occasion of some peculiarly splendid state solemnity. Hitherto Mrs. de Courtenay had been consoled under all her sufferings from Madame Albadoro's diamonds, by the secret consciousness that, let her be as splendid as she would, she could never be as perfectly well-dressed as herself, because she could never learn that peculiar art of adapting the dress to the person, which none but a very pretty and very coquettish woman ever does learn to perfection. But now even this source of consolation forsook her.

The form of Madame Albadoro was tall, but though well-formed, it approached, *tant soit peu*, to the meagre; a defect of which Mrs. Courtenay was the more sensible from the beautiful contour of her own exquisitely-moulded form. But now the thing was altogether changed. The flowing drapery of the

ample shawl, every fold kept happily in place by the just sufficient weight of the gold-embroidered border, meandered over the Marchesa's graceful length of limb in a manner that suggested the idea of an antique statue; while Mrs. de Courtenay herself was unhappily wearing a scarf, endured for the sake of its costly richness, but which, by the force of contrast, now assumed the appearance of awkward stiffness.

Gracious Heaven!—If Madame Albadoro could assume such grace from being draped in a web of Cashmere, how would her own form look if it were so adorned? For a moment, however, she felt a short relief from a movement of womanly suspicion. That shawl could have reached the hands of the Albadoro only from those of the mussulman ambassador—an infidel! The whole society would become aware of it—they ought to know it, and they should know it, if the gift of speech was left her but for an hour longer.

By a very natural movement she turned, as these thoughts occurred to her, towards his

Asiatic excellency, who still assiduously kept his place beside her, and perceived, greatly to her surprise, that he now wore, though she had strangely overlooked it, the very identical shawl, which, on a previous occasion, had occasioned so great a sensation. She perceived also, that beautiful as was the shawl worn by Madame Albadoro, that of the Turk was incomparably more beautiful still, for it was not only bordered with embroidery of gold, but a shower of golden stars appeared to have fallen over it, giving to its yielding softness a perfection of elegance that was truly admirable.

So very earnest was the gaze which she fixed, almost involuntarily, upon this part of his excellency's paraphernalia, that although not particularly remarkable for the quickness of his perceptions, he observed it, and smiled.

His excellency, indeed, was perfectly conscious that the exquisite web, which, gracefully traversing his ample person, and thrown over his right shoulder, encircled his loins again, and again, and again, in its soft embrace, was by far the most superb specimen of

the precious fabric that had ever been permitted to visit Venice; for among all the inhabitants of earth, the sultan only possessed one more perfect still.

Hafiz Pacha made a movement with his hand, which brought still more conspicuously to view the three yards and a half breadth of the marvellous texture, which seemed to have its rosy-tinctured web prevented from finding its fitting place upon the lap of Iris, only by the weight of some dainty devices which some fanciful fairy had traced upon it in gold.

Mrs. de Courtenay looked from the knee of his excellency, over which the embroidered wonder hung, to his face. Perhaps she expected to read there some trace of the fervid feelings which the sun of the East is supposed to impress with peculiar power upon his favourite children. Perhaps she thought that neither saint, savage, nor sage—to say nothing of a Turk, could sit so long beside her without being a little in love!

Mrs. de Courtenay was a lady enjoying the advantages of a more untarnished name than

the generality of Venetian beauties could boast of; but at that really awful moment she felt, poor lady! that even an untarnished reputation might have a price. She looked in the Turk's face, but she found nothing there at all likely to bring her nearer to the Cashmere shawl, or farther from her own esteem; and from some cause or other she sighed deeply.

Just at that moment, her young daughter, who had been engaged in that distant part of the vast apartment appropriated to dancing, approached the raised dais, on which the most distinguished persons of the court were seated, and blushing like the newly opened blossom of an early rose, sought the shelter of her mother's side. At that instant Mrs. de Courtenay was startled by a sound from the lips of her Asiatic neighbour, which caused her suddenly to turn towards him, and from that very disagreeable epoch in her existence she became aware that there might be some, though by no means the more civilized part of mankind, who doubted her being the most beautiful lady in Venice.

The Venetian morning began then, as it does now, at about three o'clock, P.M., and it was soon after this hour on the following day, that Mrs. de Courtenay received intimation from my Lord Pentegrot's groom of the chambers, that a member of the Ottoman embassy requested that she would permit his approach. A strange, visionary sort of apparition of the wondrous shawl flitted across her mind, and it was with something like a suppressed sigh that she gave orders to admit him. The gentleman who usually attended the Turkish ambassador on all his visits was then shown in, and when the attendants had withdrawn, he respectfully informed the lady that the noble Mussulman to whose suite he had the honour of being attached, requested permission to wait upon her.

Now Mrs. de Courtenay knew perfectly well that it was almost as much out of the common way for a Turkish ambassador to make morning visits to ladies, as to dance—and again the vision of the radiant shawl flashed across her; but it came not accompanied now with any

agitating hopes of Turkish love, or trembling fears for English discretion. In short, she knew not what to make of the unwonted request; but she granted it.

It was not, however, till about the same hour on the following day, that a perfectly unornamented gondola stopped before the palace-stairs of the British embassy, from whence two persons, enveloped in large cloaks, descended. Madame de Courtenay had caught a glimpse of them from behind the curtain of a window that looked out upon the grand canal, but she shook her head, convinced that these were not the visiters she expected. Nevertheless, as speedily as solemn steps could be expected to traverse solemn corridors, the door of the apartment in which she sat was thrown open, and Hafiz Pacha announced. The individual who followed him, and who appeared not to be of the rank of those who attended his excellency into company, having deposited a packet, which he bore carefully in his arms, upon a marble table which ornamented the centre of the room, retired, having,

however, first received an audible command from his turbaned master, "to wait."

The door of the apartment was then closed after him, and the ambassador of the sultan was left *tête-à-tête* with the sister of the ambassador of England. The door was closed upon them, and I will not presume to open it.

The interview was a long one; but what passed in the course of it has never, to the best of my knowledge and belief, been made known to any. All that I can further record of it is, that when at length the conversation between the lady and gentleman was over, the door was opened by the latter, and the person in attendance on him, recalled. The pacha then took the parcel which had been deposited on the table, into his own hands, and placing himself between the lady and the attendant Mussulman, pronounced in French,—

"Is it for you, madam, or for him?"

A much stronger emotion than usually disturbed the serenity of the English beauty's countenance, passed over it as she listened to the demand; but after a short delay, she

replied by silently stretching out her arms to receive the packet which his Ottoman Excellency continued to hold in his.

The very instant this action was made, the Pacha stepped forward, with a movement very unusually rapid for one of his nation and rank, and gently laid his burden in the arms of the lady. She received it without uttering a word, and turned away her head from him as she did so; but ere he quitted her, he said distinctly in her ear—

"To be publicly reclaimed, if faith be not rigidly kept."

The lady trembled—but still she answered not, and in the next moment she was alone.

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The opening fête of the carnival given by the Doge was followed by a multitude of others, all extremely splendid, and gaining perhaps in gaiety what they lost in magnificence, from inevitable inferiority of the locale: not indeed that the saloons of Venice are not among the noblest in the world; but there is no second palace like that of the Doge upon earth.

There was, however, at the carnival balls of that year, one marked inferiority in all that succeeded the one which has been described at the Doge's palace; for at no subsequent one did the young and lovely Clara de Courtenay appear. Innumerable inquiries were made concerning this disappointing eclipse, but all the information which the *beau monde* of Venice could obtain from her mother was, that she had over-fatigued herself on the night of the Doge's ball, and had never been well since.

And was Clara really ill! Had the first opening of her beautiful eyes upon the light of a thousand tapers so overpowered her young spirits, as to render a retreat into the nursery absolutely unavoidable? Her mother said so. Mrs. de Courtenay informed everybody who inquired for her daughter, that it was quite by her own choice, and not by any ordinance of the physician, that she remained at home, while all the rest of the world were dancing; and that she hoped, by indulging her in this wish for retirement, the sort of nervous malady from which she appeared to be suffering would be relieved. When inquiries after the

health of an invalid young lady are addressed by an anxious public to her mother, the answers they receive must, of course, pass unchallenged; so all the Venice world declared that the pretty young creature who had enchanted all eyes at the first carnival ball, had been so startled and agitated by the novel scene, that a fever on the nerves had seized her, which must, at least for that year, prevent her appearing among them again. The Lord Pentegrot was uneasy, really very uneasy about her. He was told by her mother, that the irritability of poor Clara's nerves was becoming so great as to create the most serious fears for her reason, and that the only mode of treatment which appeared to affect her favourably, was keeping her in a room with very little light, and in a state of the most perfect stillness.

"The calamity which threatens us," said the good lady, "is certainly the most melancholy in the world. Madness, you know, is generally inherited; and if the thing gets talked of, you may depend upon it that those

who would like to send your lordship home, in the hope of succeeding to your diplomatic honours here, would not fail to seize upon the report, and make the best use of it."

The Lord Pentegrot looked exceedingly frightened.

"Nay, dear brother," resumed the lady, "I say this but to put you on your guard. As yet I am quite sure that we are safe. I suffer no one but Nina, the young Italian girl she is so fond of, to approach her. The sight of poor old Alice irritates her so fearfully, that I have been obliged to confess the truth to the good creature, and she alone, of all your lordship's household, has the slightest idea of the melancholy fact. And I cannot but think, my lord, that the sooner Alice is sent home the better."

"She must be sent off immediately," replied the Lord Pentegrot, knitting his brows. "Yet stay awhile," he added, looking exceedingly ill at ease—"may she not circulate the dangerous report, in England!"

"Trust me, there will be no danger from any such report, at the remote village where

the daughter of Alice lives, to whom, of course, she must be sent, with a small sum of money, and the promise of continued wages till the result of this unhappy illness is ascertained."

The Lord Pentegrot felt all the wisdom of this measure, and as a special messenger to the British government was about to depart immediately, it was decided that the good nurse should depart with him; a sudden and violent manner of dismissing a faithful old servant, but which was rendered, alas! only too intelligible to her, by the assurance that nothing was considered so dangerous, in the present unhappy state of Clara, as the risk of her seeing her. To which assurance another was added,—namely, that if her beloved nursling ever recovered her reason, she should be recalled.

In this most melancholy state of things, it became rather a comfort to the Lord Pentegrot to hear, that the once loved girl from whom he now feared all manner of mischief, was daily declining in health. Nevertheless, both uncle and mother felt that, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, it would be exceed-

ingly injudicious to withdraw themselves from society, and accordingly they withdrew themselves from nothing, continuing to reply to all who continued to inquire about Clara, that she was profiting, both in health and spirits, from being permitted to return to her youthful occupations and amusements, the too sudden and too early dismissal of which had so painfully affected her. Perhaps some people thought, and perhaps some people said, that they wondered how Mrs. de Courtenay, having once enjoyed the gratification of seeing the admiration her beautiful young daughter inspired at court, could now appear without her so contentedly. But these people were not aware that the beautiful mother of the beautiful daughter had a little *affaire de cœur* upon the *tapis*, in which her tranquillity had received a dreadful shock, by perceiving that the man she loved and hoped to marry, had gazed upon her daughter as men do gaze when they look upon something which they feel to be more captivating than anything they had ever seen before. Without this feeling, per-

haps, the strange catastrophe of my tale might never have occurred. It must be remembered that not only at the first fête of the carnival, but at all those which followed, the Turkish ambassador, and the sister of the British minister, had frequent opportunities of continuing the friendly intercourse which had sprung up between them. His Ottoman excellency, indeed, did not pay Mrs. de Courtenay any more morning visits, but they had often a good deal of conversation together.

At length, however, the appearance of Mrs. de Courtenay in public suddenly ceased, and it was generally understood that the health of her daughter had unexpectedly become worse. Then all the world found out, somehow or other, that she was at extremity, and then the British minister himself became invisible, and all the world was informed that she was dead! It was very melancholy, very shocking, very sad, particularly in the midst of the carnival, but it could not be helped. The Lord Pentegrot was speedily obliged to reappear, in order to resume his diplomatic functions, and even the

greatly compassionated mother thought it her duty to reappear too. And thus, in a very few weeks the recollection of Clara and her muslin frock remained but like a dream, for everything went on as if she had never existed. There was indeed one remarkable difference perceptible, when the brief mourning permitted by the regulations of court ceremony had passed away. Madame Albadoro was no longer distinguished among all the ladies of the circle by wearing the most magnificent shawl ever seen on European shoulders; for Madame de Courtenay appeared with one fifty times more magnificent still. The eyes of ladies are not given them for nothing—nay, they are not given them only for the purpose of subjugating their masters. Many bright glances, when directed to the resplendent shawl of Mrs. de Courtenay, recognised the wondrous web which they had well nigh worshipped, when they had seen it adorning the portly person of the Turk.

Had Mrs. de Courtenay not been the sister of the British minister—or even had her manifold attractions not been rather particularly

displayed, with the obvious intention of charming one who was not a Turk—it is impossible to say what insinuations might not have got into circulation. But as it was, nothing more was said of it than that some commercial treaty might be looked for between England and the Porte, in which it was probable that the latter would be found to have the advantage.

But notwithstanding the matchless shawl, the noble gentleman to whom Mrs. de Courtenay had given her heart, and intended to give her hand, did not, as it proved, think it advisable to take it. Moreover, the Lord Pentegrot lost thousands and only won hundreds, at the games of chance to which he more and more devoted himself; so that altogether the affairs of the family did not appear to go well; and some very abominable Jews, who had been applied to, did not behave as respectfully as they ought to have done: so that, in short, it became evident, both to the British minister and his sister, that the sooner they were recalled from Venice the better it would be for them.

Their departure was not, at least to their

own hearts, quite so gay a thing as their arrival. The spirits of Mrs. de Courtenay, after the disappointment in her love-affair, had drooped exceedingly; and even the sight of her shawl, though she looked at it frequently, did not delight her as it once had done. Perhaps, the vacant place in the darkened gondola which used to be occupied by the figure of Clara, when they were borne across the lagune to take possession of the splendid palace prepared for them, might produce somewhat of a painful effect upon her spirits; certain it is that she arrived in London a greatly altered woman.

A peer of the realm, reduced to poverty, is always an interesting spectacle in the eyes of personages in power; and once again the same influence which had been used to send the Lord Pentegrot to Venice, now sent him to Portugal, and thither, too, his sister accompanied him. But she was no longer the same lovely appendage to his state as before. Her extraordinary beauty had in a great degree departed from her, and so heavy a gloom had, partly from that cause, and partly from some

others, settled on her spirits, that the escape of her brother from his gloomy home into all sorts of undignified dissipation was not greatly to be wondered at. Seventeen years, however, wore away, and they both lived on, both sorely changed in appearance, but continuing, though with great difficulty, to hold the same dignified position in Lisbon which had first brought him there.

At length, there occurred a great change in the management of political affairs at home, and the Lord Pentegrot was recalled. This event reduced him to a state of poverty which no nobleman of exalted views and dignified character could possibly endure; and so he died. The situation of his sister was certainly not much better, but she contrived to live on, though not without difficulty. She had a small pension from the English government, and on this she managed to exist. As to living in London, poor lady, after the lamentable change which her position had undergone, it was not to be thought of, and she accordingly crept away, and deposited herself in the

smallest of all imaginable lodgings in the village of Hampton, which placed her so near the court as to enable her to profit, once or twice a year perhaps, by the pitying residue of court favour which permitted her appearance at the palace on days of reception. Poor, miserable, conscience-stricken Mrs. de Courtenay! Of all the claims to distinction in which she had formerly gloried, she retained but one, and that one was her mysteriously obtained Cashmere shawl. But the glorious nature of this treasure, which partakes in some sort of immortality, preserved this solitary relic in all its pristine brilliance, and though she well knew that, by selling it, she might for a long time save herself from the necessity of the rigid economy she was obliged to practise, she could never bring herself to do it, for she never wore it without perceiving that she was still an object of attention, and probably of envy.

It happened one summer, while the court was at Hampton, that an illustrious nobleman arrived from France, upon a political mission

of considerable importance. His arrival was so sudden, and his stay so short, that it was by no means possible to prepare a reception for him at the court of St. James's; but nothing which could be done to make the suburban palace brilliant was omitted, and a fête was given to which all persons in the neighbourhood, who had the *entrée*, were invited. The ball with which the fête concluded was a very splendid one; but of all the beauties assembled there, the young daughter of the French ambassador-extraordinary was the most admired.

She was indeed a very lovely creature, and the fair mother by whose side she sat was scarcely less so. Upon such an occasion it was quite certain that Mrs. de Courtenay and her shawl would be present, and either one or the other, or both, attracted the attention of the Duchesse de Fredonaielle so strongly, that she could not take her eyes away from them.

"What is the name of that very old lady in the magnificent Cashmere shawl?" said the Duchesse to a lady near her; for the Duchesse

de Fredonaielle spoke very good English. "Once in my life, a great many years ago, I remember seeing a shawl that, if I mistake not, was very like it. What is the old lady's name?"

"Poor old soul! Does she not look like a spectre?" returned the lady thus addressed. "We all say that she ought to put her beautiful shawl over head and all. Her name is Mrs. de Courtenay."

The Duchesse de Fredonaielle started violently; but the lady she had spoken to, having turned her eyes in another direction, did not observe it. Her attention, however, was speedily recalled to the noble stranger at her side, by suddenly feeling the weight of her person on her shoulder: the Duchesse de Fredonaielle had fainted.

It is scarcely necessary to say that a considerable degree of confusion ensued; but the Duke, who was the most affectionate husband in the world, being informed of the accident, himself conveyed her to the apartment allotted to them in the palace, and had soon the plea-

sure of witnessing her recovery, which was as sudden as her illness had been. Poor old Mrs. de Courtenay was sitting in her little closet of a parlour, on the following morning, when the servant girl of the lodging-house threw open the door and announced a name, which her pronunciation rendered perfectly unintelligible; but the old lady stood up to receive her guest. It was the Duchesse de Fredonaielle. She approached the tottering lady with a rapid step, and throwing her arms around her, caused her, with gentle violence, to resume her seat, and then dropped on her knees before her.

"Who and what are you?" screamed the astonished woman—"are you not the noble Frenchwoman who fainted last night?"

"Mother," replied the beautiful Duchesse, with a sob—"mother! I am your child!"

"And the Turk?" screamed Mrs. de Courtenay, trembling from head to foot.

"The Turk proved a friendly Christian to me," returned Madame de Fredonaielle, with a gentle smile. "When I made him under-

stand that I could not love him, he gave me to one whom I could and did love, though I had only danced with him once, mother. But he loved me as quickly. He watched over my destiny, and converted it to the most happy one that ever befel a woman. Mother! you have nothing to regret."

It is to be hoped that this assurance soothed the last hours of the wretched Mrs. de Courtenay; but she did not long survive the surprise which the appearance of her daughter occasioned her. A visit from the Duke and from her grandchild was proposed to her, but she declined both, and when the forgiving Duchesse came to repeat her pious visit for the third time, which was on the third day after their first meeting, she found that her mother was dead.

The wretched lady had found time, however, to make, and properly execute, a last will and testament, by which she bequeathed to her daughter the magnificent Cashmere shawl.

THE

ORGANIST AND HIS DAUGHTER.

THE

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AMONG the innumerable enjoyments of life must surely be counted the act of travelling, with all its consequent results, of new images, new ideas, and new emotions, gathered as we go. There are foreign travels and home travels, both exceedingly delightful to the locomotive individuals who perform them, provided always that the said travels are set about wholly and solely for the delectation of the traveller, and not upon compulsion, or upon that sharp necessity of moving from place to place, after the

manner that I heard briefly and expressively described the other day on board the Folkestone steam-boat on its passage to Boulogne, by a *gentleman traveller*, who said, dolorously enough, I thought, "I never can hope by any chance to sleep in less than three hundred different beds any year." Not exactly after this manner should I call travelling delightful; but when set about by less useful bodies, who may turn which way they like, prompted solely by their own particular will and whim, I almost doubt if any other occupation of time be equally so.

Of the travelling abroad we hear a good deal, but of the travelling at home, very little; and yet for those peeps into real living life, which it is always interesting to take, and often interesting to hear of, it may be doubted whether the home-peepers do not sometimes see more clearly than those who only peep abroad.

It is not very long ago since some of my home wanderings took me to one of our fine old cathedral cities. I shall be very careful

not to say which—nay, not to give any quite unmistakeable local touches—because I am going to tell about people as well as things, and it is vile to be personal. Besides, we all know that a study after nature may sometimes be too faithful.

The beautiful little Gothic cathedral of my episcopal city stands holily apart in its quiet close, to which it gives an air of tranquil dignity and solemn beauty which may and must be felt, but which I conceive it impossible to describe. A very few years ago, however, the foreground of the gracious edifice, look at it from what quarter you would, presented nothing more attractive to the eye than a wide expanse of rudely-laid pebbles, across which passed the paved roads, or streets, at right angles to each other, for the purpose of approaching the prebendal houses, and one or two less dignified dwellings that had stolen in among them; the whole of the shapeless area being dotted over by a multitude of stumpy white posts, connected together by chains, which seemed intended to guard the pebbles and the paving-stones from each other.

But now the aspect of the place is wholly different, and improved in a degree so wonderfully great in proportion to the simplicity of the process which has achieved the change, that at the first glance given by those who knew it formerly, and see it now, it seems like the work of magic. This process was neither more nor less than removing the pebbles, and laying down soft fine turf in their stead. A few venerable and highly picturesque elm-trees stretch their branching arms around the building, as if to shelter it, and often in the breeze of evening may be seen bowing their lofty heads in salutation to the pinnacles that rise above them, loftier still; so that altogether the trees, the turf, and the grey stone blend into a very pleasing harmony, and seem to prepare the spirit for its passage from the world without, to the world within the sacred fane.

The prebendal houses are, as they ought to be, very handsome houses, each one with more or less of "garden trim," enclosed within lofty walls as venerably grey as the cathedral itself.

But on one side of the close, immediately behind the sacred edifice on its eastern side, and so completely hidden by it as to be invisible to all, save those who go expressly to seek its humble door, is a little bay-windowed dwelling, looking even smaller than it is, by the contrast it offers to its majestic neighbour. Its one sharply angular window is screened from all intrusive eyes by those high, green canvas blinds of some fourscore years of age or so, yet still so well preserved as to defy the most curious eye to pierce through them, and discover how the small room they shelter is occupied within.

But if the gentle reader will trust to my description, he shall know something about it, without using any unjustifiable means for getting a sight of it himself. The little parlour, which, by the help of its bow, is at least twelve feet long, though not more than ten feet wide, has been the constant living room by day of three individuals for the last seven-and-twenty years, and of the parents of one of them for many a long year before. But at

the beginning of the above-named period of twenty-seven years, one of its three inhabitants did not contribute much to crowd it, for that one was a new-born female babe.

The little maid's father was organist of the cathedral, as his father had been for nearly half a century before him; and her mother was the very pretty, very gentle, but very simple daughter of a small farmer in the neighbourhood, who, in marrying Mr. Oldbury the organist, truly believed in her heart that she had made a greater match than ever village girl had made before. That the worthy organist was forty years her senior, in her estimation mattered not a jot. She was as decidedly Mrs. Oldbury, and as certainly sat, morning and evening, every Sunday of the year, in a snug little corner in the organ-loft, as if her spouse had been twenty, instead of treble that age; or, as if, instead of seventeen, she had herself been forty. For Mary Hobson had nothing flirt-like, or even frolicsome in her nature; and excepting for her slight figure, and her pretty little face, she might very well have been sixty also.

Hubert Oldbury had been married once before, and the wife of his youth had loved him as an amiable young wife loves an amiable young husband; and, though childless, they had been a very happy couple—more happy, indeed, than poor Hubert ever expected to be again; but he knew not what was in store for him. Mary Hobson's innocent little face had caught his fancy, and she seemed so very docile and so very good, that he ventured upon making her his wife, though he thought when he did it, that he was perhaps a rash man. And so he, doubtless, was; but he was also a lucky one.

Within a year after this second marriage he became the father of a little girl, and the old man was startled, and almost bewildered, by the sensation of new and unexpected rapture with which he gazed upon the little helpless treasure. His young wife liked to be a mother too, but her joy was in no degree like his; and this, not only because she was a young thing to whom the event seemed greatly more natural than startling, but also because her nature was

still more unlike that of her husband than her years.

It was a very ardent spirit that still warmed the heart, and animated the fancy, of that old man; there was something of poetry in his composition, which, though it had never found any other vehicle of expression than the keys of the majestic instrument by which he gained his bread, was, nevertheless, poetry still, and lent an earnestness and a refinement to his feelings which nothing but that sort of temperament can give. His demeanour was gentle, but had nothing beyond what might be passed under that epithet to distinguish him from many millions of other poor men who lived honestly by means of small gains procured by their own exertions. Yet this exterior was only for the world, and for his pretty little wife, perhaps, among the rest. But for Huberta (for he had fondly given his own baptismal name to his little daughter)—for Huberta and himself he had a good deal more.

I am not going to attempt the impossible achievement of imitating that marvellously

fine portion of Zanoni which introduces to our intellectual acquaintance a sort of poetical abstract of an etherealized Paganini; I am not going to attempt it, first, because neither I nor any one else, as I believe, could succeed in the attempt if they made it; and secondly, because, if I did, I should still fail of giving any correct idea of *my* heroine's musical father. For Hubert Oldbury was a very pious Christian, and had he not been so, he would have been a much less admirable organist; which, as I take it, will sufficiently prove that the most able imitation of the wayward enthusiast of Naples could not assist me in giving an idea of my old musician. Phrenologically speaking, Hubert Oldbury was probably as strongly marked out by nature for the vocation he followed as the Neapolitan himself; but whereas the gifted Italian's imagination seemed to create around him a world that owed its origin to himself alone, old Hubert, in his moments of most highly-wrought excitement, only fancied he was finding his way to Heaven by harmony; and he almost wept,

good man, while pealing away the half-inspired strains of his Handel, to think of the devotion of that God-chastised race, who were doomed to the penance of hanging their idle harps upon the trees.

As old Hubert was not a phrenologist, I know not how it happened that, before his little daughter was old enough to produce a note of music, he felt perfectly assured that nature had created her a musician:—but so it was. Perhaps, as he made her mother hold the child on her knee beside him as he played, he saw some movement, some undefined but visible emotion, in her deep blue eye, that told of a spirit within, which was ere long to hold communion with his own.

Nor was he disappointed in this; for his little daughter was scarcely five years old, ere she gave such decided evidence of the gift she had received at her birth, as to lead many besides her happy father to declare that it was his duty to cultivate to the best of his power a talent from which it was very evident she might reap both fame and fortune. And the

playing and the singing of the little Huberta began to be talked of by a good many people of consequence. The dean's housekeeper assured the dean's lady that she did not, on her conscience, believe that ever such a wonderful little creature had been seen on the earth before. And this having been many times repeated to the dean's lady, at length reached the ears of the dean himself. And then old Hubert was kindly invited to bring his little maid to the deanery; and so well did she justify the housekeeper's report, that the father and child were again invited, and this time there were many persons collected to listen to the young phenomenon. And the little soul, though at other times a rather shy and timid child, so totally forgot all the fine folks around her, as soon as she was placed on the music-stool and told to play, that she disgraced not any of the eulogists who had prepared the company for disappointment by the enthusiasm of their praises.

For a little while the worthy organist was delighted at all this; but then he began to

hear a multitude of prophetic whisperings on the subject of his little Huberta, that made him suddenly assure all the kind ladies and gentlemen of the close that his child had shown symptoms of delicate health, and that, to avoid fatiguing her, she was to play no more for the present before company. This was really a very provoking disappointment to many; for a musical phenomenon in a country town is an acquisition of no inconsiderable importance. But it was the fair lady who was the cause of it that, justly enough, was the first to feel its effects. The Honourable Mrs. Wimbleton, the wife of one of the prebends, had assured poor trembling Mr. Oldbury, that if it was not by some very culpable negligence entirely his own fault, she would take upon her to say that his little girl might live to be a *prima donna* at every opera in Europe;—which would be a glory to England as well as to him.

For one short moment old Hubert looked, as the Honourable Mrs. Wimbleton declared, perfectly stupified; but the fact was, though she did not find it out, that the good man

stood before her during this interval in the act of prayer, and earnestly indeed did he implore Him who by His voice divine had commanded that little children should be brought unto Him, that his little one, his little Huberta, might straightway lie down and die, rather than live to fulfil this fearful prophecy; but no sooner had he finished his prayer, than his ear again became sensible to many other words of like import, uttered by kind ladies and gentlemen, in order to convince him that the more the little girl studied at home, and the more she appeared before her kind friends abroad, the better it would be for her, inasmuch as it would aid and assist in accomplishing what ought to be the first object of his life—namely, the preparing her for making her appearance on the stage. Hubert Oldbury said very little in reply; in truth he scarcely spoke at all; but he bowed his gray head very civilly, and taking his little girl by the hand, told her to make a courtesy, and led her away.

Now the Honourable Mrs. Wimbleton had very kindly determined upon giving a *soirée*,

to which not only all the close, and all the native artistocracy of the town were to be invited, but some of the first country families also, all for the express purpose of hearing the singing and the playing of the little Huberta, to whom she intended to present a particularly pretty new frock on the occasion. Great, therefore, was her disappointment when the gracious present and summons were despatched, to find that the first was returned, and the second declined on account of the delicate health of the little girl. Nevertheless, the impression which the child had made was too strong to be easily forgotten, and for many months inquiries were made and invitations repeated; but when it was found that the same answer was ever returned, everybody concluded that the seemingly premature fruit had proved but a blighted bud, and that they need trouble themselves no more about the old man's child.

But, though all danger was thus happily over, the poor organist did not recover from his fright, but kept steadily in view the resolutions

he had taken on hearing the flattering prophecy of the Honourable Mrs. Wimbleton—namely, that the first object of his remaining years should be, the keeping his Huberta where she could neither be seen nor heard by anybody in the very least degree fashionable and genteel, and the second, to educate her himself to the very best of his little power and skill.

It would be difficult to say which of the two resolutions he had kept the most faithfully, and about equally so, perhaps, to decide which of the two produced the greatest influence on the character of the little girl.

If no such alarm had been given, the humble musician's child would certainly not have been likely to have seen much of the world, or to have been much seen by it. But the difference in such a case is very great between a little and not at all. In the morning early, almost in time to hear the lark's first song, Huberta was led into the pleasant meadows near the city, by the hand of her father; and again, at eventide, both mother and father, when the weather was fair, failed not to take her with

them to a pretty rustic water-mill, the foot-road to which, was an unfrequented path, rarely or never trod by gentlemen or ladies, and therefore, as old Hubert thought, especially well suited to them. Excepting for this daily exercise, and for a visit paid to Mrs. Oldbury's parents about four times a year, the organist's daughter literally never left her father's roof. In respect to her education, the old man was not quite so much his own master, as in the matter of seclusion; yet even on this point he kept his resolution as faithfully as on the other, for he had only resolved to give her the best he could, and this he most assuredly did.

But no inconsiderable part of Hubert Oldbury's little income arose from giving singing lessons to the choristers of the cathedral, and as the doing this with the most patient and sedulous attention appeared to him a duty, only second in sacredness to the care of his daughter, his time was very greatly occupied by it. A portion, however, of his twofold task could be advantageously performed with his pupils and his little girl together. The music

that he best loved to teach her could not be practised better than when the boys were practising also. By degrees, however, she began to accompany both herself and them upon the organ, and when she had reached the age of fifteen, had any eyes been permitted to look at her when seated at the instrument, breathing a strain to which angels might have listened well pleased, she might have been mistaken for an angel herself, and supposed, being immortal, to have sat as the model of the saint of saints, to Raphael. But excepting the little boys, there was no one to look at her, save her father. Among those little boys, however, there was one nearly of her own age, but so small in stature as to appear younger still, who had already for many a day contrived to look a little at Huberta, without greatly neglecting his score.

Henry Morley was the organist's favourite pupil and his best. Not that his voice was better, or even so good as that of one or two other boys, but he sang with taste and feeling. Nor was the old Hubert at all more

aware of this fact than the young Huberta. And Henry, in his turn, listened to her as no other could listen to her, no, not even her father. And she knew all this; and she knew, too, that nobody understood Henry's singing, and the manner in which it should be accompanied, but herself. Yet they very rarely spoke much together, and never but in the presence of the good organist, who no more suspected that Henry thought Huberta an angel, or that Huberta knew Henry to be a poet, than his good wife herself, who was ironing the shirts at home.

But all this mysteriously clear understanding between the boy and the girl was not to last long, for the fortunate destiny of the boy ordered it otherwise. The father of Henry Morley had himself been a chorister, but had given up this as he had advanced in life, and was now keeping a preparatory school for little boys, with so much credit and respectability, that more than one of the clergy attached to the cathedral had entrusted their children to him as day scholars, for a year or two before

dismissing them from the paternal roof for public education.

It was well known, however, that the young Henry, boy as he was, had the honour and glory of teaching the Latin grammar at this very flourishing little day school, and as he was known likewise as one of the most correct, as well as the most pleasing, of the justly boasted choir of the cathedral, he had a sort of name and fame among the dignitaries, which eventually led to great advancement. It chanced that one of the prebends was father to an urchin who, in his way, had also acquired fame and name, being considered by all who knew him as the very naughtiest boy, and the very greatest dunce, upon record. The governess had given him up, after a long trial; his mamma had given him up, after a longer; his father had tried his hand and rod for a fortnight, and then declared that he must give him up too;—so that the revèrend family of this very irreverend child were reduced to despair.

"Upon my word, Dr. ——," said the mamma, "I think the best thing we can do

will be to send him to Morley's school. He will be flogged to death if he goes to any *real* school in the state in which he is now."

"Upon my word that is a capital idea, my dear," replied the doctor; "I wonder I never thought of it before. Young Morley shall be sent for. I will speak to him myself."

And young Morley came, and he listened to the very melancholy paternal communication with great attention, and though he was a very little fellow for his years, he left the doctor in better spirits than he found him, chiefly in consequence of having repeated twice in a voice that sounded like that of gentleness itself—

"I will be patient with him, sir."

Henry kept his word. He was patient, and his patience was rewarded. The child he had to deal with was no fool, and having made this discovery, Henry soon found means of convincing others of its truth. In short, the father became persuaded that as nobody ever had, so nobody ever would have, as much power over him as Henry Morley, and as the young scapegrace was an only son, proposals were made to Henry's

father to permit his son's going to school with the boy, in order both to cram him, and keep him in order. But the sacrifice on the part of Henry's father was too great, and the offer was refused, till it was repeated with a promise to send the young tutor to Oxford, all his expenses paid, upon condition of his remaining with his pupil (who was but three years his junior) for four years at Eton. This was too temptingly glorious to be refused, and Henry Morley left his father's school, and his choral duties, and his music lessons, and the organ-loft, and Huberta, in the hope of becoming in process of time a scholar, a gentleman, and, as he hoped in his secret heart, a clergyman also.

And how did it fare with the little girl when he was gone? Had each told each that the thing most dear on earth was the other? No, never! Nor was there any need of such avowal between them; neither of them had any doubt of the fact. But what was the use of talking about it? It was a melancholy parting, though nobody knew it but themselves, for the great good fortune of Henry was

the only theme dwelt upon when his departure was spoken of, and to talk of it as a subject of regret would have been quite absurd. So the two young hearts throbbed, and swelled, and ached, and sunk in silence. But the condition of the boy was incomparably the least melancholy: for though of a gentle spirit, he was ardent in hope, and though the prospect of his marrying Huberta was distant and dim, he could still look steadily at it, and think that it might be reached at last by means of his own unwearying exertions. And it was this thought that converted his last farewell look into a smile. But Huberta did not see it, for her eyes, in spite of all her struggles, were dim with tears, and she had no hope within to check them.

Years wore away, and nothing that Henry Morley had hoped and intended to do, had been left undone. Very literally indeed was he a *private* tutor during his schoolboy days, for no one knew or guessed how conscientiously he devoted himself to the task he had undertaken. But in this most surely was his virtue

its own reward; for, by the process of earnest and most assiduous teaching, he became himself a scholar, and the self-teaching he had received in his younger days was rapidly atoned for. In process of time, he became head of the school, dragging his idle pupil after him, in a manner to satisfy very fully the hopes of his patron. And then the two lads moved on together to the university, and here again all went well with them, and the hopes of Henry, although as yet he could have only hope, and nothing else, strengthened, term after term, and year after year, till at length the decisive moment came, and he obtained a first class degree.

Of course all this good news, throughout all the six long years which it took to achieve it, was made known from month to month—nay, almost from day to day—to the friendly organist and his family; for Henry's mother was a proud woman, and though her husband's school had fallen away, almost to nothing, and though she found it hard enough to live, even with the help of a fortune bringing in twenty pounds a

year, recently inherited from her parents, she ceased not to boast pretty loudly of the honour and glory and unequalled prosperity that had fallen upon them by means of her son. And the good news was welcomed joyfully by old Hubert, now in very advanced old age, for he still called Henry his dear pupil, and in his heart believed that the boy owed his success to what he had learned from him. And it was welcomed more joyfully still by old Hubert's wife; for, simple soul as she was, she had long ago spied out the secret love of the famous scholar for her daughter, and though she did not talk much about it she thought the more, and felt quite freshly over again that when she had married the organist of ——, she had indeed done something for her family, and she would defy anybody to say that she might not live to be the mother of a parson's lady yet.

And how did the good news affect Huberta? Had the pale, black-eyed chorister-boy remained her idol during the six important years that had changed the tender, faltering, blushing girl into an intellectual and most

lovely woman? Oh, yes. There was no shadow of changing in Huberta's nature. The first sensation of her infant heart had been warm, tender, grateful love to her old father, and that dear father was the object of precisely the same sentiment now, only grown stronger, more defined, and better understood by herself. And as an infant she had fondly loved her gentle mother too, and fondly did she love her gentle mother still. The first conscious workings of her intellect had seized on the philosophy of harmony as its natural food, and such it was still. But no pure and uncorrupted spirit can thus feed without growing purer, and better still; nor is it harmony of soul alone that raises the spirit so gifted towards heaven. It vibrates in unison with the harmony of all created things, and while kept as clear from the harsh discords of earth as that of Huberta, seems more than half angelic before it flies home again to the realms above.

This heart, this spirit, devoted to Henry Morley at an age too early to name without

danger of ridicule, were devoted to him still, and it was no more possible that Huberta Oldbury should ever love another man, than that she should learn to prefer a jew's-harp to her organ, or the melody of "Jump Jim Crow" to that of "Angels ever bright and fair."

Neither had these six years passed away without Henry's having found a few opportunities of explaining to her that the perspective of his enlarged prospects always terminated at the same point, and that if elective empires were still in fashion, and that instead of having only been sent to Oxford he had chanced to have become a reigning Cæsar, it would have made no difference—she must either have promised to become his wife, or have seen him sink into an early grave. Nor was this more truly uttered than truly believed. And now, then, is it necessary to say how all the good news concerning Henry Morley affected Huberta Oldbury? By gentle degrees, her old father, and her still young mother, were made acquainted with this at-

tachment, and the engagement which grew out of it was sanctioned by the blessing of both.

On the side of Henry's parents matters did not go quite so smoothly. The poor old man, indeed, never dreamed of making any opposition, nor would have done, had his "extraordinary son," as he always called him, announced his intention of marrying in process of time either the daughter of a duke or of a cobbler. He considered him as a person infinitely too superior to all the rest of the world for any person whatever to be in a situation to give him advice with propriety. Besides, to say truth, he did sometimes look at the clean and quiet comfort of the Oldburys' little establishment with envy.

As the organ of the cathedral continued to be better played than that of any other church in the kingdom, neither the dean nor the chapter troubled themselves to inquire whether it were done by the fingers of the still healthy old man, or by those of the delicate little girl, whose health, as was well remembered, had been too fragile to permit of her

becoming a phenomenon. So Hubert Oldbury was organist still, and still, by some means or other, the singing class prospered as well, or rather better than ever, under his care, and thus his professional appointments had suffered no diminution. Moreover his wife's worthy father, the farmer, was dead, and had left Mrs. Oldbury eight hundred pounds; and thus the little family went on extremely well; which was more than could be said of that of their neighbour Morley. They also, indeed, had but one only child, and he was provided for: but still there was rent to pay, and neither father nor mother could do without food, and fire, and clothing; so that their twenty pounds a year, with the miserably little profit arising from the school, could by no means suffice to produce as comfortable a little *ménage* as that of the organist.

But notwithstanding her poverty, Mrs. Morley was exceedingly ambitious, and did not scruple to declare to her husband—nay, even to her son himself, that in her estimation nothing on earth could be much more absurd

than the idea of a young man who, in all earthly probability would one day, be a clergyman, talking of marrying the daughter of an organist! However, Mrs. Morley was not only ambitious, but very sensible, and she knew well, as she told one or two confidential friends, that there was no occasion for her to frighten herself about any such nonsense. Oxford scholars, she had often heard, would talk about love and such like foolery, sometimes, let them be ever so clever, and she supposed her son would do like the rest of them; but that when a gentleman and a clergyman thought about matrimony, it was altogether a different affair, and people in general, she believed, began to know that Henry was no fool. So she contented herself with occasionally telling her son that he would find he was mistaken if he fancied he was to marry Berta Oldbury, and adding the same as a postscript to every letter she wrote him; conceiving this, together with his increasing age and dignity, sufficient to secure him from all serious danger.

As soon as Henry had taken his degree,

he thought that his prospects were sufficiently improved to justify his asking Huberta to correspond with him, which he had never ventured to do before, as never, till this trial was passed, had he felt sure of the result. For who can answer for their own firmness of nerve under such an ordeal? But when this was settled he felt assured that as a teacher he could gain his bread, and then he asked for the indulgence for which he had been longing for years, and his old master made no objection to it, and his young mistress wished for it with no less ardour than himself, and the commencement of this correspondence formed a new epoch in their lives.

And then it was that the little bay-windowed parlour became a paradise to Huberta, for she had it all to herself—all to herself and her writing-desk. Her dear old father, despite his four-score years, still passed whole hours in the organ loft. Sometimes with one pupil, sometimes with another, blowing the bellows for him, and receiving from time to time important hints upon chantings of all sorts. Her

mother, the most active and neat-handed of housewives, knew better than to sit in a parlour, and waste her time in looking over the green canvas blinds, or than even looking in the face of her beautiful daughter as she wrote, with the most delicate of crowquill pens, long pages of heart-inspired eloquence to her lover. And thus it was that Huberta had the little bay-windowed parlour to herself.

The perfect stillness both without and within, was, during these delicious hours, a blessing beyond all price. If she raised her eyes to meditate, which most, of all the crowd of thoughts that dwelt upon her heart, she wished to communicate, they rested on the beautiful curve of the Lady Chapel, which immediately faced the window. No passing step, no ill-toned, idle voice, disturbed the deep repose. All was peace; not rustic, rural peace, with its chirping sparrows, and its lowing herds, but a sort of holy cloistered peace, more tranquil still.

And thus passed one, two, three, smooth, pensive, contemplative years. Henry's first

pupil, the prebend's son, was already ordained, and had already got a very excellent living; and Henry, meanwhile, got several pupils, and during the vacations felt that he envied no man, for then he passed whole days in the company of Huberta; they walked, they read, they sang, they talked together. And the happy future, though distant, very distant still, began to take something like a palpable shape before their eyes. Henry must endeavour to get connected with some school, and then they would marry, and whether rich or poor, happy they must be.

Ere long a friend of Henry's, greatly his superior in position, as well as in age, but warmly attached to him, and perfectly aware of his superior talents, suggested the propriety of his standing for a vacant fellowship in one of the first colleges of the university; and in an evil hour the young man listened to him; he became a candidate, and succeeded. At first, this was a matter of exceeding joy, and well it might have been had no Huberta Oldbury existed; for the fellowship was a very

good one, and his college was amongst the richest in the University in respect to its church preferment. Of course, the next step in the young man's career was his taking orders, and the thrice happy Mrs. Morley directed a letter to her son, prefixing the word "Reverend" at full length to his name.

And now again, as a matter of course, was Huberta superlatively happy,—for the man she loved—oh, so very dearly! was on the high road to preferment, to fortune, to station, to everything, in short, that his most affectionate well-wisher could desire for him. And did she at all perceive athwart this bright halo of success, the vague uncertainty of the distance at which the event was placed that was to blend their lives and fortunes into one? Not quite immediately. For some months after his becoming fellow of —— College, and for longer still after that prime ambition of her heart, his ordination, took place, the letters from behind the canvas blinds were written in a sort of ecstasy of hope and joy, that seemed to wrap her spirit round with happi-

ness, so that no doubts or fears had power to reach her.

And then followed that earth-born reaction of the spirits, which ever comes after great excitement and exhilaration, as if to remind us that we had better not fancy ourselves in heaven already, but remember that there is still a good deal to be borne and done before we get there. And then the pen rested suspended in her hand, and the sweet blue eyes would remain raised, and fixed abstractedly for minutes together on the delicate tracery of the Lady Chapel windows, and the winged thoughts grew heavy, and could not spring forward into the future with such elastic lightness as they were wont to do. Realities, dark, heavy, present realities, would press round, and sit like imps and nightmares on her heart, till the pain caused her to move, and rouse herself in the hope to get quit of it; and then she looked down upon her paper, and saw with astonishment that it was blank!

This was quite new, and very strange to her, for ever till now, the pages had seemed

to fill themselves—oh, so much faster, than she wished them to do!—for the little crow-quill ran along the lines as if propelled by some impulse within—that she had as little power as wish to check. Where was that impulse now? Could she recall it? Could she again write on, she knew not how, but even with a feeling of enjoyment, which, exquisite as that with which she devoured the dear reply, was to her life what the sun is to the universe? What! could she no longer feel when writing to Henry, that the allotted space was all too small? Was that outpouring of her thoughts, which knew no boundary to its full sincerity but the want of words, for ever checked by the fear of communicating some little flavour of that bitter drop that began, by slow degrees, to settle at the bottom of her heart—that sickening poison of dear hope delayed, which gives a faintness worse than death itself?

All this is written and is read at a rapid, easy rate, that serves but ill to illustrate the manner of its working in the heart of Huberta.

It took three weary years to bring her to the state I have described; and during that time she had never written nor spoken a single word that could convey an idea of the despondency that was eating like a canker into her soul, either to Henry or to any other *human* being whatever.

One must know a little by experience the order of sensations produced by hope delayed, before it is possible to give all the honour to such forbearance which it deserves. As the stated period for Henry's visit approached, how often was her pleasure blighted by the dread that her resolution might fail, and that she might let him see some portion of the heavy weight that hung upon her spirits. But again, and again, and again, this dismal fear proved vain; for the sight of that loved face, the sound of that dear voice, the deep delight of listening to the assurance, ever dearer and more dear, of ceaseless and undying love, chased the dark demon that tormented her, and made her feel—alas, how certainly!—that she had still the power of tasting

happiness. And two more years passed on, without a murmur ever passing from within the heart of Huberta, and with little that could be fairly called so from her lover.

But widely different was their lot, and widely different (as in such sad cases it must ever be), was the merit of endurance in each. The career of the stout-hearted Henry was active, useful, and cheering. He had many pupils, and was well paid for them; his acquaintance, his intimacies with the most estimable and distinguished portion of his contemporaries, went on pleasantly increasing, till he had more than sufficient of excellent society to occupy every leisure hour, and to stimulate his talents to the exercise which is at once the most healthful and agreeable that human faculties can enjoy. That he should, some day or other, have a good living, was, if he lived, a matter of certainty; and meanwhile his income was more than sufficient for all his wants, and enabled him, moreover, to chase everything like want from the humble dwelling of his father. He felt conscious,

every year of increasing vigour both of mind and body, nor could he be quite blind to the fact, that from a slim, and somewhat sickly-looking youth, he had grown into a manhood of more than ordinary comeliness. Tall, and very finely formed, with coal-black hair, and dark eyes of remarkable beauty and expression, Henry Morley could not be seen without admiration.

Yet all these accidents of nature and fortune had not spoiled him, nor had he lost in the very least degree the pure, young, fresh devotion of his love for Huberta—*only* he had not yet learned to feel that years will sometimes lengthen as they go, till the object to which they seem to lead appears so fearfully to increase in distance, that despair is apt to jostle hope aside, and become the companion of our way.

Meanwhile, the evening trio in the little parlour behind the Lady Chapel, became a very sad one. The poor organist waxed weaker and weaker, but his intellect was perfectly clear still, and a very reasonable anxiety took possession of him, as to the immediate

fate of his wife and child, when his salary as organist, and his allowance for instruction to the boys of the choir, should be lost to them by his death. Although it was quite certain that his daughter had long become his substitute in both, it was no less so, that to his name the remuneration was paid, and what was to become of her and her mother when that name ceased to be counted among the living? That his lovely and still young Huberta should apply for the place of singing mistress to the boys of the cathedral, was of course quite out of the question; but he thought that, under all the circumstances, the place of organist might be obtained for her.

The old man thought, too, of the great success which had attended the infantine display of her talents some twenty years before; and though he was, if possible, further than ever from regretting that he had not permitted her to profit by the display of them, he began to think that, in the widely different walk of instruction, they might now become available to her support.

Her engagement to Henry Morley was a source of great comfort to him; but he had passed the age when fancy has strength and power sufficient to bring the sorrows, the regrets, the hopes, and the fears, which make the chief history of life, so vividly home to the heart, while yet they still lie unborn within the womb of time, as to make all the evils attendant on the distant and uncertain period of its fulfilment a matter of any great wailing.

What he did feel was the certainty that the interest of his wife's little fortune of eight hundred pounds, which he had placed in the funds in her name, would not be sufficient to insure bread and shelter to her and her daughter when he was gone; and seldom did an evening pass over them without the old man's recurring to the theme, with a view to pressing upon them the necessity of at once endeavouring to secure the appointment of organist for Huberta, and of making interest at the same time among the ladies of the dignitaries, for the honour of becoming music-mistress to their daughters.

Mrs. Oldbury affectionately blessed the old man for his thoughtful care, and declared that she would set about putting his excellent plan into execution as soon as ever Huberta could find time to dress herself and go out with her. But Huberta, though as gently obedient to command as before the mature womanhood of twenty-five years had reached her, was not on this occasion so alert in her compliance as she was wont to be. Far was she from disliking the duties of an organist. She had performed them long, and there were moments when these duties had more power to elevate her spirit above all the sorrows and the fears of earth than any other occupation whatever. But she felt a very painful doubt as to the manner in which Henry might receive the information that she was about to apply for the situation. That she had long performed its duties, he well knew; and often had she heard him declare that he never loved her so well as when watching her with the inspiration of a saint, and the piety of a Grecian daughter, aiding her poor father in his weakness. To

his eyes there was something sublime in this, and Huberta felt that when his wife, it would ever be remembered by them both with pleasure. But the case would, as she strongly suspected, be far different in his eyes were she to be hired to the task. Still less did she believe that he would endure the idea of her parading her talent from house to house in search of bread.

Henry was no way boastful of his new dignities, but Huberta had tact enough to see and feel that his station had become that of a gentleman, and that he knew it. In reply, therefore, to the often repeated proposal that she should wait on one great lady or another, and respectfully intreat her interest and patronage for obtaining both the appointment and the scholars, Huberta had again and again pleaded for a little delay. But this could not go on for ever; for her father, who indeed felt that he had not long to live, became urgent with her to comply with his request, till at length she gave a promise that she would delay no longer; stipulating, however,

that she must obtain the consent of Henry before she began the work of supplication. And she waited but for the tranquil hour of the following morning, at which the little parlour was sure to be her own, in order to write to him.

The task was a painful one. She did not like the throwing herself upon him thus, and making him, as it were, responsible for her having the means of existence, in case his affection should shrink from her labouring to supply those means herself.

Where was now the tender, the delicious feeling with which the writing-desk used to be opened? Where the enjoyment of feeling that she might write, and write, and write, without the slightest danger that any obtrusive eye from without, or voice from within, should interfere with her luxurious solitude? Gone, quite gone—the poetry of life seemed to be vanished for ever, and nothing left in its place but a miserable anxiety to find wherewithal to be fed and clothed!

The letter was written, and the answer

came. It earnestly entreated Huberta not to take the step she proposed, assuring her that he conceived it would be extremely disadvantageous to the future interests of both, and delicately, but very distinctly, hinting that should assistance be wanting, she need apply to no other friend than himself. Perhaps Huberta was wrong in feeling that this matter of fact, but very affectionate epistle, increased her sorrows; but certain it is, that she did feel it, and that the idea of applying to the charity (as she miscalled it) of her lover, gave her perhaps the bitterest pang she had ever felt. She showed the letter to her father and mother, however, and thenceforth escaped all further importunity on the subject of the place and the pupils. And then followed a new page in the history of Huberta. Every thought was now turned to the possibility of saving from their present income what might enable them to eke out what would remain after her father's death, in such a manner as to support existence till—till another change should come —till she should die, perhaps, or till—oh! the

immeasurable distance of that possible future! till Henry should get a living from his college, and be able to marry her.

In this project she met with no opposition from either father or mother. The gentle-spirited old man, despite his own predictions, continued to live on, but he could no longer leave his room, and as every want was supplied as usual, he was wholly unconscious of the change that was taking place in his household. Neither did her mother offer any opposition to her plans. The good little woman's health was failing; her mother had died early, and there certainly seemed to be every likelihood that she would follow her example. Having arranged the best bedroom (that over the little parlour) with all the little comforts she could think of for her old husband, she gradually began to feel that she never was so much at ease in any other place herself; so that the rest of the little mansion was solely at the disposition of Huberta.

Her first reform was dismissing their servant, and this she did, performing all her

duties in a manner that prevented her absence from being any loss to her parents. But this could not be done in conjunction with her daily duties in the organ-loft, without a degree of persevering industry that kept her literally hard at work from morning to night. But where everything goes on quietly, people who are incessantly waited upon are very apt to forget how much time and labour is bestowed upon them. Hubert Oldbury and his wife little guessed that Huberta often sat up half the night to repair their clothes, or in washing and ironing them; still less did they imagine that the comfortable economy which had formerly supplied the family table, was now changed into a system of such rigid abstinence on the part of Huberta, as seriously to impair her health. But her little hoard very perceptibly increased, and the assurance that she should not be obliged to ask Henry for money whereby to live, seemed to console her for every thing. And thus wore away two other years.

But not all the labour, not all the privation those years brought, could be compared in suf-

fering to the dreadful disappointment of not seeing Henry during the course of them. An offer, advantageous, in every way, of travelling for two years with a pupil, had induced him to submit to this melancholy privation; and when the letter came which announced this to Huberta, together with the confession that he could not afford the expense of a journey that would allow him only one day to pass with her, she had not the consolation of knowing that his own heart was wrung by it, and that it was endured only that the little hoard that he too was making, in order to meet her wants when she should lose her father, should not be reduced by the indulgence.

Quietness and peace are not the same; nay, in many cases I suspect that they are as little allied as riot and enjoyment. Could unbroken quiet have sufficed to the happiness of Huberta, she might have accounted herself the most happy creature alive; for never did time flow on with so little variety as with her.

When Henry had been gone rather more

than a year, Mrs. Oldbury died, and this event, from the nature of the departed individual, produced as little change as it was possible such an event could do. A few words that she uttered, however, not many weeks before she died, did leave a deep impression on the mind of her daughter. Huberta was seated beside her bed, with the light full upon her face, while the eyes of her sick mother were earnestly fixed upon her.

"Huberta, my dear," said Mrs. Oldbury, who at that time was quite as well as she had been for many months before—"Huberta, my dear," said she, "you certainly are nothing like so pretty as you used to be. How old are you, my dear child?"

"Twenty-seven, mother," was the reply.

"Yes, to be sure, and so you are, dear. Only to think of it, Huberta! Why I was just ten years younger than you are when I married. But it won't be much matter for you, I suppose, because you have got a husband provided; but it is a pity that beauty should go so soon, isn't it?"

At length, the long-expected letter came from Henry, announcing his return to England, and promising to see them soon;—and then he came—and his eye fixed itself steadily on the pale cheek of Huberta. How freshly did she remember then her poor mother's words, and how well she felt that she understood that look!

In general, the visits of Henry to the bay-windowed parlour were always made in the afternoon; but on the day following his arrival at ——, he had something to say to Huberta, which brought him to the house when the poor young woman was in the sort of deshabille which domestic offices, when performed by one pair of hands, render inevitable.

It is not very common to see in one of humble birth a figure so strikingly graceful as that of Henry, when, with the chartered freedom of old acquaintance, he lifted the latch of the house-door, and passed on to the kitchen, looking in vain into the little parlour as he went. Still less common is it to see

such a being as Huberta, so very humbly attired, and so very humbly employed as he found her. Her delicate face became, for one moment, as red as scarlet, and in the next as pale as virgin snow. She seemed not certainly very greatly delighted to see him, and tears, of which she was herself hardly conscious, fell fast upon her cheeks.

Again, Henry's fine eyes were earnestly fixed upon those pallid cheeks, and then he suddenly took his leave, saying, that he found his visit was ill-timed, and had distressed her. She had no heart to bid him stay; besides, she knew that he would come again in the afternoon, and then she would try to look less miserable. But the afternoon passed away, and he came not; the next day followed, and he did not come near her; and on the next, she received the following note from him:

"Forgive my leaving you so abruptly. I have at this moment too much to do, even to talk to you, my dear Huberta. Nor can I see you again before I return to Oxford. But to prove to you that I have not forgotten

your wishes, I have spent the morning in canvassing for your appointment to your father's place, and happy am I to tell you that I have succeeded. You are already, dear Huberta, the appointed organist of —— cathedral."

Huberta read this note without shedding a tear, and yet she felt that it was the last she should ever receive from her lover. And she was right. It was the last.

It is savage to lift the veil from before such suffering as that of Huberta. She complained to no one—she scarcely murmured an expression of misery to herself. Then why expose the sorrow that she held sacred? Her life moved on as usual, save that she replied not to this last letter of Henry. For this she felt that she had not sufficient strength, but for all other duties, they were performed as faithfully as before.

It was one day short of a week from this event, that Huberta, having smoothed her father's pillow for the night, was sitting alone

beside a very feeble lamp in the little parlour, when she heard the house-door open, and a hasty step approach. She was in no mood to feel terror at anything; she scarcely started, but raised her eyes to see who was thus intruding on her too careless security.

Might she believe her eyes? Was it indeed Henry? Yes, it was Henry—Henry, no longer Fellow of —— College; no longer the prosperous tutor of many pupils, but an almost destitute young man, who dared to hope that she would immediately marry him, though he must throw himself as a burden upon her little income; his best hope being that he might obtain the office of teacher to the cathedral singing-boys!

Did Huberta receive her poor, destitute lover harshly? Did she reproach him with his imprudence? Or did she accept him with such a fulness of unhoped-for happiness as only those who have sorrowed, as she had sorrowed, can feel?

Nothing would satisfy the venerable organist but the being carried into the cathedral to

witness the wedding, and give away his daughter. And I take it upon myself to assure my gentle readers, that the little bay-windowed parlour behind the Lady Chapel of —— Cathedral, was that day the scene of a *festin de mariage*, the happiness of which equalled that of the very happiest that ever was celebrated in the world.

* * * * * *

It matters very little, but, for the satisfaction of the curious, I will add, that Henry Morley suffered not in his worldly fortunes so much as some folks may think he ought to have done, by this exceedingly abrupt proceeding. He had done his duty by many pupils, and one among them did his duty to him in return; so that he is now, as I understand, in very easy circumstances; and moreover, I am assured by a person who paid them a visit just ten years after this marriage, that Huberta was then one of the very loveliest women of her age that the proud eye of a happy husband ever looked upon.

THE BUTT.

THE BUTT.

"Nature has many such."

"It is singular," said William Morton, to his friend and fellow-collegian, Charles Wilmot, "to see such a family as the Belmonts. Amongst them all there is not one—no, not a single one—male or female, that is not essentially witty."

"I think I should be afraid of them," replied his friend. "Wit so often shows itself in satire, that it is sometimes dangerous to come near it."

"That is not the case with the Belmonts," said Morton. "They are, without exception, the best-tempered set of people I ever came near. Their conversation is one perpetual

flow of good-humoured pleasantry—no biting, carping, discontented harshness among them. And then they are all so handsome! Upon my honour, I never saw such a set of people in my life."

"All handsome? Father, mother, sons, and daughters?" demanded Wilmot.

"Yes," returned the other, after a pause. "Father, mother, sons, and daughters—all handsome. I do not exactly mean that Mrs. Belmont's eyes are as bright as her daughter Fanny's, or that the gentlemanly-looking old man, her husband, is as striking in appearance as his son William; but Mrs. Belmont is particularly well-looking for a middle-aged woman, and Mr. Belmont is exactly the sort of person I should like to be myself, if I live to be as old. In short, I tell you that it is a very singular thing to meet with such a family."

"I wish you joy of your good luck, Morton," returned Charles Wilmot. "It will make your first season of real liberty in London pass very pleasantly—provided always that you do not fall so seriously in love with

either mother or daughters as to make your heart ache."

"Mother! Nonsense! And as to the daughters, I see no reason in the world why I should not fall in love with either of them. Only that I don't think I should be ever able to decide which."

"There is always safety in numbers," replied Charles. "But you have quite forgotten that I came here to drive you to the Park. Are you still sufficiently your own master to go there? Or will it be necessary to ask the Belmont family if they can spare you?"

"If I thought they would answer '*No*,' I would ask them directly," said Morton. "But how can you be such a fool, Charles, as to let me talk of them to you as I have done, over and over again, and yet never ask me to introduce you? You are either too proud, I suppose, to ask a favour of your friend, or else you are thinking of Highfield Park, and its dependencies, and are afraid of being caught. But you are quite mistaken if you fancy that he Belmonts are fortune-hunting misses. You

would see in a moment, if you knew them, that they are quite in another line. They all seem to enjoy the present too keenly, charming creatures! to trouble themselves much about the future. Why do you not wish to be introduced to them?"

"I have not said that I do not wish it, Morton," replied Charles.

"But will you tell me with proper emphasis and accent that you do?" demanded Morton.

"You are very *exigeant*, my good friend," returned the other, laughing. "I never saw you so difficult before."

"I am not *exigeant* for myself, but for my charming friends," he replied. "I am such a good-natured fool, Wilmot, that I cannot endure to think of what you lose by not knowing them; and yet I don't quite like, either, going about begging young men to be introduced to them."

"Well!" replied Wilmot, "I will satisfy you if I can. Will you do me the honour of introducing me to your friends the Belmonts?"

"Yes, Mr. Wilmot, I will," returned Mor-

ton, "and the deed shall be done at once. Instead of taking me to the Park, let us immediately drive to Bolton-street."

"Agreed!" was the reply, and in a few minutes the two young men were ushered into a handsome drawing-room, in which was seated a lady of some forty-five or fifty years of age, surrounded by four younger ones.

William Morton had not exaggerated the facts, when he said that the Belmonts were a handsome race. They really were very handsome. The mother was a tall, well-made woman, with regular features, fine eyes, and a natural residue of a fine complexion, that had had neither illness, sorrow, intemperate dissipation, nor an intemperate table to convert it into either yellow or purple.

Of the girls, the eldest was very like the mother, only not quite so tall. The second was rather less regularly handsome, but was favoured by nature with a pair of peculiarly fine eyes, the sparkling brightness of which lighted up her whole countenance, and caused her to be often accounted the most attractive

of the family, though perhaps the least beautiful in feature. The third, however, was by many considered as the beauty *par excellence*, on account of her lovely complexion, which really did approach as nearly to roses and lilies in its exquisitely blended tints, as it is well possible to imagine. The fourth young lady was seated apart from the rest, and her dress, though delicately neat, had not that pretty, well-appointed finish which marks the morning toilet of an English young lady of fashion, when seated in a drawing-room, ready to receive morning visitors. She was a pretty, delicate-looking girl, and might have been observed, by any one who happened to take the trouble of looking at her, to be rather remarkable for the perfectly faultless symmetry of her form. But she was too unobtrusive and quiet-looking to attract much attention; she was not a daughter of the Belmont family, only a niece, and her name was Mary Bell.

"Ah! our good friend Morton!" exclaimed Mrs. Belmont; "I am delighted to see you! We were just planning a hundred and fifty things in which you are to be concerned."

Mr. Morton bowed and smiled, and when the lady paused, said—

"Will you permit me, Mrs. Belmont, to present my friend, Mr. Wilmot, to you? I would not ask this favour for him, did I not know him to be deserving of it."

"I am happy to see you, Mr. Wilmot: my three daughters, Mr. Wilmot. I fear that Mr. Belmont is not at home, but he will hope to see you at some future time; and *à propos* of other times, do tell me, Mr. Morton, if your friend is a *charade* man? You must know that my girls have caught a charade fever from the Sommertons, and I see plainly that I shall have no rest till I get up something of the kind here."

"I answer for no man upon such occasions," replied Mr. Morton.

"Will you answer for yourself?" exclaimed the animated Fanny, Mrs. Belmont's second daughter.

"Assuredly," replied Morton. "In this, as in everything else, I can answer in all sincerity that—'I will, in all my best, obey you, madam.'"

"And *your* answer, Mr. Wilmot?" said the mother, with a glance almost as lively as that of the daughter.

"The echo of my friend's answer shall be mine," replied the young man.

"Bravissimo! Now then, Charlotte," said Mrs. Belmont, addressing her eldest daughter, "I think you may begin your operations; we can manage to furnish the female part of the troop ourselves, *faute de mieux*, and our boys, with the aid of these two gentlemen, will make us quite strong enough to begin. We can go on raising recruits as we may find it convenient afterwards."

"We must positively have a *père noble* secured before we set off," said Margaret, the youngest of the Belmont graces; "for papa declares he shall put us all out if he attempted to play, and the character, you know, is wanted perpetually."

"That is quite true, Corinna," replied Charlotte; "but you would not let the whole thing fall to the ground for want of a *père noble*, would you?"

"Good Heaven! No!" exclaimed Fanny, with a degree of earnestness that showed her heart was in the business. Then casting a beam from her refulgent eyes upon the shady distant spot where her cousin was sitting, she said, with a little air of drollery which became her infinitely, "Could not Mary Bell do the part of *père noble?*"

Of course every eye was turned on Mary Bell, but it was difficult to ascertain whether she had herself heard the sally; for the more than quietness, the deep stillness of her features was not disturbed by it. Whether her eyes, had they been visible, would have shown whether she heard or not, it is impossible to say, for they were fixed on the needlework with which she was engaged, and only benefited her needle. But every other eye spoke mirth, and on every other lip there was a smile; for in truth there was a comical sort of incongruity in the bright-eyed Fanny's proposition, which it seemed difficult to receive with gravity.

"If you can persuade her to try it, our

troop will gain immensely!" cried Margaret, the roses and lilies dimpling into a thousand smiles.

"We must try what soft persuasion will effect," said Charlotte, with a sort of comic gravity that the family seemed to relish excessively; for though not loudly or boisterously in any way, the mother and her three daughters all appeared to be nearly convulsed with stifled laughter. Mrs. Belmont concealed her face as much as her pocket-handkerchief could do it, but not so effectually but that what was going on behind it might be perceived. Charlotte clasped her hands together, then stretched her arms upon the table, and concealed her fair face upon them. Fanny looked round her with an air of solemn gravity in every feature, save her eyes, but they laughed, oh! they laughed with an intensity of merriment that it would have been difficult to withstand; and Margaret, who, like her mother, employed her pocket-handkerchief in concealing her face, began at length to weep from excess of laughter, for she removed the

cambric from the lower part of her face, and appeared to be wiping tears from her eyes.

William Morton looked from one to the other, evidently puzzled to understand the cause of their mirth; but then, with the feeling of a young man who does not like to be left out of a joke so very generally enjoyed, and evidently so very good, he determined that he would share it, and accordingly he got up, stepped briskly up to the window, appeared to wish for concealment, and then turned round with enough of the remnant of a laugh on his countenance to make it very evident that he had enjoyed the jest as much as the Belmont family themselves, which they all seemed to observe and appreciate as a proof both of wit and good fellowship, for they all exchanged most intelligent glances with him, and he felt, with the very greatest satisfaction, that he was growing more intimate with them every day.

As to Charles Wilmot, he sat by, almost as quietly as Mary Bell herself; for, feeling that any attempt to understand what was going

on must be useless, he made none, and screwed his courage to the endurance of being "*left out;*" endeavouring to look as much at his ease as he could, and, as he was not a shy man, he succeeded tolerably well, being able, in the course of a few seconds, to direct his attention to his companion in gravity, and became convinced, before the laughing pantomime was over, that she was very nearly, if not quite, as pretty as the prettiest of her young companions, notwithstanding her immovable stillness, and the disagreeable fact that, for all purposes of being looked at, she was as effectually without eyes as a statue; for though he had turned as many glances towards her since he entered the room as was at all consistent with politeness, he really had not as yet ascertained whether she had any eyes or not. That she had eyelids and eyelashes he was quite aware, and if any eyelids and eyelashes could have satisfied a man in the absence of the living lights to which they belonged, he might have been satisfied; but nevertheless, he was not; and was still looking

so earnestly at her, in the hope of getting a peep at what was thus pertinaciously concealed, as quite to have forgotten all the mysterious mirth that was going on, when Mrs. Belmont appeared suddenly to recollect him, and exclaimed—

"Pray, Mr. Wilmot, do not think us such idiots as we appear to be. I feel exceedingly inclined to say to you, 'Je ne suis pas si bête que j'ai l'air.' When you know us better, you will discover that it is absolutely impossible to exist in the presence of my absurd girls without being eternally moved to unseasonable mirth by some ridiculous sally or other. As to that atrocious Fanny, with her horrible eyes, she is worse than all the rest; and I do assure you, I often tell her she will be the death of me. But the unprincipled little wretch goes on without paying the slightest attention to my remonstrances, and how long my existence will be spared, Heaven knows! You may perceive that your poor friend is already become a victim!"

Upon hearing these words, the three Miss

Belmonts renewed their demonstrations of joyous ecstasy, without even affecting any restraint, the first uttering a musical sort of little shriek, inexpressibly comic, the second prettily mimicking the applause of a theatre by tapping an open volume which lay on the table with her knitting needle, and the third laughing heartily, *sans façon*, but so elegantly *sotto voce*, as to avoid the slightest approximation to being noisy. No family, perhaps, ever laughed so much, with so little noise, as the Belmonts.

"Do be quiet, you vile children!" resumed Mrs. Belmont, "or I give up the charade scheme altogether."

These words caused the three pretty, playful creatures to place themselves, with an air of exaggerated precision, each with her hands before her, and each with her pretty mouth contracted into half its natural dimensions, in order to convince their mamma of their sedateness.

"Now, you look like good children," said Mrs. Belmont, bending her head with an air

of solemn approval, which caused a slight convulsive movement to agitate the features of the "three grave Graces," as their fond father delighted to call them; but it was speedily conquered, and their mother went on to explain to the new recruits the various duties that would be required of them.

The young men listened with great attention, and then assured her that they should hold themselves in readiness to enter upon whatever particular tasks should be assigned them, at the shortest possible notice.

"Oh, when shall we begin, mamma?—when shall we have the first?" demanded Fanny, eagerly.

"Why, you know, my dear," replied Mrs. Belmont, "that I cannot get people together in the height of the London season, by holding up my finger to them. If we wish the rooms to be filled, we must send the invitations a month beforehand, at the very least."

"That is perfectly true," said Charlotte, "but is it not a horrid bore to wait so long?"

As she turned her head towards Wilmot as

she spoke, he replied to her question by observing that at any rate there must be a great deal of practising before they should feel ready to perform before full rooms.

This suggestion was hailed with great applause, and Fanny, looking at him with indescribable archness, said—

"I am by no means certain that the practising may not prove the best part of the business."

Charles Wilmot smiled, and nodded as cordial an assent to this as if he had been an *habitué* of six months' standing, and as he looked at her, he acknowledged to himself that Morton was right, and that there was an immense deal of beauty in the Belmont family.

Just at this moment the door opened, and two handsome, gay-looking young men entered, so like each other that they might almost have been taken for twins.

"Bravo!" cried Charlotte, "here comes William the Conqueror, and at his heels our dauntless Richard the Lion-hearted. Now we shall get on, you will see."

And then, Mr. Wilmot having been properly

brought forward as a new acquaintance, the two brothers were as quickly made acquainted with all that had been decided upon respecting the charades, as it was possible for four ladies, all speaking together, to make them.

"Capital, by Jove!" exclaimed the Conqueror.

"I am devilish glad you are going about it in earnest," said Richard, "for it is exactly the sort of thing to suit us. And now, mother, if you please, we must examine the *locale* a little. Exits and entrances cannot be made in the same style that the butler and footmen walk in and out. We shall probably find it necessary to take off that door and substitute a curtain, and it will be desirable also to have some light sort of frame-work made on the opposite side of the room, covered with canvas, or another curtain, or in fact, anything you will, provided it conceals a space large enough to permit an exit on that side as well as on the other. It will be utterly impossible for all the characters to come and go, for ever and for ever, on the same side."

"Most assuredly it will," replied his mother. "But if we mean to do the thing well, or in other words, Richard, if the governor enters into it with sufficient spirit to permit a little expense, we ought to have a curtain across the stage; and in that case I should have it hung across our immense folding-doors, and give up the back-drawing-room to the performers, leaving only enough space in front for a prettily-decorated stage, with a back-ground of festooned drapery, blended with flowers, or statues, or something of that sort—but no lights, observe—not a single lamp or candle must be behind the performers. A strong light, concealed from the spectators, must be placed within the folding-doors, and this, with a row of good foot-lamps, also concealed from the company, will be quite sufficient."

While Mrs. Belmont was thus discussing the preliminaries with her younger son, the elder was in the hands of his sisters, who, leaning over him as he sat, appeared to be all talking to him together, but the narrative they were giving was uttered in too low a tone to be

heard by any one but himself; but to him, at least, it appeared to be sufficiently intelligible, for it almost convulsed him with laughter, which at length became sufficiently remarkable to attract the attention of Mrs. Belmont.

"What are you about, children?" she exclaimed. "A very pretty welcome you are giving to Mr. Morton and his friend! They are really too silly for anything! Do you come here, Mr. Wilmot, and you too, dear Mr. Morton—come and help me form a committee of ways and means."

On receiving this summons the two young men eagerly rose and approached her, while at the same moment the eldest son and her three daughters bounded with the graceful lightness of a group of fawns from the spot they occupied, and immediately surrounded her.

This general and very animated movement made the unbroken stillness of Mary Bell so remarkable, that young Wilmot involuntarily stopped short, as he passed before the isolated little work-table at which she was sitting, and stood aside, as if to let her pass on before him.

But she either saw not or heeded not, or would not seem to heed the attention, for she neither moved her head, nor raised her eyes, but continued her work as steadily as if she had been sitting alone. The action of Mr. Wilmot, trifling as it was, sufficed to draw the eyes of the whole party upon him, for it had caused a pause in Mrs. Belmont's eloquence.

"Have you set your heart upon enlisting Mary Bell as one of our performers, Mr. Wilmot?" said William Belmont, stepping towards him.

"If you would do me the favour of introducing me to the young lady," returned Wilmot, "I should be very happy to enlist her if it were possible."

"If," repeated William Belmont, laughing, "However, I know no reason in nature why you should not try. *Allons!* let us make the attempt at once." Then raising his voice, he added, "Ladies and gentlemen, our friend Mr. Wilmot is about to undertake a difficult and somewhat thorny enterprise, in which I think we all ought to support him—'*à moi, mes Belges!*'"

At this cry, the whole family rallied round him, Mrs. Belmont herself being of the number, though she arrived not with the first rush that brought his sisters and brothers to his side, but followed with a graceful matronly step, a pleasant smile upon her lip, and something more merry still in the twinkle of her eye.

"Now, then!" exclaimed the Conqueror, "now for the introduction! Miss Mary Bell, permit me, at his own particular request, to present to you Mr. Charles Wilmot, a young gentleman who is extremely anxious, not only to cultivate your acquaintance, but your talents also."

This was followed by half a moment of immovable stillness on the part of Mary Bell, and by a silence, like that of suspended breath, from those around her. And then the young girl half rose from her seat, and made a slight bow, graceful enough as to the movement, but rather on the shady side of civility in manner, for she not only did not look at the person thus presented to her, but never for an instant raised her eyes from the ground. Having made this salutation, however, such as it was,

she resumed her seat, and continued her occupation. And then, on looking round him, as if to learn what was to be done next, Charles Wilmot perceived that the family were again in ecstasies of laughter, but still it was very quiet laughter, and by the ear alone it could scarcely have been discerned at all. But two of the sisters might be seen arm-in-arm, leaning against each other, as if in need of mutual support under the vehemence of titillation that shook their limbs, while the hand of the third was clasped in that of her younger brother, who was biting his under lip as if he would have severed it, to prevent the explosion of mirth that seemed to threaten him. Mrs. Belmont stood by with an aspect of extreme enjoyment; too much mistress of herself to fear uttering any sound she could disapprove, but as greatly amused by watching the agonies of her shy niece as the youngest among her lively children could be.

"Cousin Mary Bell! this will never do!" said William Belmont. "You have not been greatly accustomed to the fashionable world,

we all know, inasmuch as my ever respected maternal uncle, your inestimable nautical father, has hitherto deemed it desirable to lay you up in dock, where no eye but his own, I believe, was permitted to superintend the growth of your juvenile timbers. But now, Cousin Mary Bell, that the marine paternity has departed upon a cruise to China, and that my respected maternity has extended the right hand of good auntship towards you for the purpose of introducing you to the *beau monde*, I do strongly recommend that you should speak when you are spoken to, and look up when gentlemen, or ladies either, are brought to your footstool in order to be introduced to your acquaintance."

Mary Bell then looked up, and her lips too moved, though what they spoke was inaudible, and again she rose from her chair, and raising her eyes for half an instant to the face of Mr. Wilmot, she repeated her bow, and then sat down again, permitting her attention to fix itself once more upon the work it had seemed to quit so unwillingly; but her cheek, which had usually more of the lily than the rose in

it, became, as she made this great exertion, almost as brightly pink as that of her cousin Margaret.

"The conquering William is a conqueror still, you see," said Mrs. Belmont, as she looked at the delicate loveliness of her timid niece, with less of pleasure as it seemed, than of surprise. "Is he not an extraordinary creature!" she added, turning suddenly round to Mr. Morton, who stood near her.

"He is a Belmont all over," exclaimed Morton with animation.

"Isn't he?" she replied. "Not that all who bear the name have his power," she added, after meditating for a moment. "I am convinced that I might have preached for an hour to that obstinate little fool of a girl, before I could have obtained as much compliance from her as she has just shown to him. You have no idea what a plague she is!"

"Perhaps the Conqueror does not think so," said Morton. "Perhaps her coldness and reserve do not suffice to conceal from him the beautiful form, the soft beseeching eye, and the lovely delicacy of her whole appearance.

Perhaps the Conqueror may himself be in danger of being conquered!"

"Good heaven! Mr. Morton, what nonsense! I beg your pardon a thousand times; but, upon my honour, I never heard anything so absurd as the notion of such a man as William Belmont finding anything to admire in poor miserable-looking little Mary Bell. But I dare say you were only speaking in jest?"

"Most assuredly I was," replied the young man, colouring naturally, and laughing affectedly; "I cannot think how you could imagine I was in earnest."

"Oh, no! I did not really think so," returned Mrs. Belmont, laying her hand with renewed kindness on the arm of her favourite new acquaintance, who, as she justly thought, admired her family, and herself into the bargain, *almost* as much as they deserved; "but I chose to scold you a little, only for making a jest upon such a subject. Only just look at him, my dear friend! Certainly no man ever lived who understood the art of quizzing so well as William does."

The time occupied by this little *à part* between Mrs. Belmont and Mr. Morton, had been occupied by the group assembled round Mary Bell in staring at her in silent surprise. It was a received fact throughout the Belmont family, that Mary Bell was a plain, unformed, dull-spirited, and utterly stupid little girl, whose visit for a stipulated three months was the very greatest bore and misfortune that had ever fallen upon them, and which could be atoned for only by their finding in her queer, awkward ways, unceasing employment for the lively vein which so charmingly prevailed among them. But when she looked up as she made her second bow to Mr. Wilmot, there was so much of undeniable beauty and grace in her appearance, that the three sisters, and the two brothers, all looked at her with astonishment. But the Conqueror soon recovered himself, and, perfectly guiltless of any feeling that could at all justify the imprudent hint of Mr. Morton, he proceeded to furnish the quota of amusement which he knew was expected from him by his mother and sisters,

at the expense of Mary Bell. Nay, so admirably and so Belmontishly clever was he, that even this unexpected display of loveliness was turned to account, and suggested a pun that long contributed to enrich the fund of wit from which he drew his brilliant *persiflage*.

"Upon my word, fair cousin, bowing and blushing becomes you so greatly, that they make you perfectly beautiful; wherefore henceforth, instead of calling you Mary Bell, you must permit me to address you as *belle Marie*. But think not that we can any longer suffer you to devote yourself so exclusively to the labours of the needle as you have hitherto done since we have enjoyed the sunshine of your presence among us. We have this instant seen, *belle Marie*, what you *can* do in the way of being beautiful when you choose it; so now, fair cousin, be pleased to listen to the petition of this gentleman, that you join yourself to our troop of charade players."

"Delightful! oh, delightful!" cried the elder Miss Belmont.

"Cousin Mary, I will give you anything

you will ask, if you will only act in a charade," said the second.

"Oh, would it not be rich?" exclaimed the third. "Just think!—obliged to move about —obliged to look up—obliged to invent something to say! Oh, would it not be rich? Mary Bell, if you will only consent to act in one single scene of a charade, I will promise not to ask you any question across the dinner-table, when we have company, for a month to come. Tell me that you will act, dear, dear Mary Bell, only for one scene!"

"For one scene!" said Mrs. Belmont, in a voice of authority. "I beg, Margaret, that you will not lead your cousin to believe that she is to be let off at the end of one scene. With all the trouble I am going to take for the amusement of you all, it will be strange indeed if the members of my own family refuse to assist me. But we need not talk any more about it at present. My task, I suspect, will be the most difficult, and I must perform it before anything else is begun; and now let us adjourn. You shall hear the result of my pe-

titioning to my lord and master as soon as I know it myself," she added, addressing the young men she had enlisted with a confidential smile; "and if that part of the business goes well, of which I confess I have very little doubt, I flatter myself we shall encounter no further difficulty. I certainly do not mean to anticipate any from rebellion in the household."

These last words were spoken a little *sotto voce*, and the very slightest glance in the world directed towards Mary Bell, whose short-lived roses had given place to more than usual paleness, interpreted their meaning. But anything they might seem to contain in any degree approaching harshness, was softened by so charming a smile, that had Mary Bell happened to see it, she must have felt persuaded that her aunt really was one of the sweetest-tempered women in the world.

"Now, then, we will finish our unmercifully long visit," said Mr. Morton, "and shall live upon the hope of hearing from you."

The two young men then took their leave,

and were presently dashing along in the well-hung cab of Wilmot towards Hyde Park.

* * * * * * *

"Well, Charles, what do you think of the Belmonts?" said Morton, the moment after they had driven from the door.

"I think, replied Wilmot, "that they certainly are one of the handsomest families I ever saw."

"I knew you must think that," returned his friend. "But what do you think of their manners, of their conversation, of their whole style? Did you ever see anything so animated, so lively, so thoroughly fascinating and delightful? And the sons, too! Are they not fine-looking young fellows?"

"Yes, they are altogether a remarkably handsome family. But I wish you would tell me something about that pretty pale creature that they call Mary Bell. Who, and what is she?"

"She is a niece of Mrs. Belmont's. Did not you hear them say so?"

"Yes; but I want to know something

more about her. I presume that she is poor and dependent."

"Oh, dear no, I fancy not! Her father is a captain in the navy, and as she is his only child, she is scarcely likely to be what is called poor and dependent. What makes you think she is so?"

"I don't know exactly," replied Wilmot, musingly. "I suppose it is their manner of treating her."

"There, now! I will be hanged if I did not think so," exclaimed Morton, indignantly. "Now, is not that speech, Wilmot, a beautiful specimen of the justice and liberality of human beings in judging of each other? Now, just listen to a plain statement of facts, and then pass judgment on yourself. Here are the Belmont family, such as you see them, rich, well-born, and fashionable; as beautiful as angels, and every one of them full of talent and *pétillant d'esprit;* in short, a set of people in the fullest enjoyment of all the goods the gods can send. Now, it is notorious to every one who knows anything about the

matter, that where there is a family of daughters to be taken out, there can be no greater bore than having another young lady by way of a visiter. But this dull little girl's father goes off upon a long cruise, and what does Mrs. Belmont do? In the very height of the London season, when every inch in a carriage, or an opera-box, is of inestimable value, she sends off an invitation to this very stupidest of nieces, and whom, by the way, she perfectly well knew to be such, to pass three months with her. And what has been her reward? It is rarely that any day has passed since she arrived, without my spending some part of it with them, and, I declare to Heaven, I have never once seen her smile since she entered the house."

"But may not that be owing, Morton, to her not feeling happy and at ease among them? It is evident that *persiflage* and quizzing are among the most favourite of the Belmont pastimes; and, do you know, I think it very likely it may make her feel uncomfortable," returned Wilmot.

"Nonsense, Charles Wilmot! If she really feel thus gloomily discontented at the sight and sound of innocent playfulness, she certainly must be one of the most thoroughly unamiable people in existence, and the sooner she is cured of such a temper the better for her."

"And do you think the best way to cure her will be persevering in the lively mode of treatment administered to her this morning?" demanded Wilmot.

"Certainly. It is not only the best, but the only way," replied his friend. "Did you not perceive that William Belmont's good-humoured *badinage* did at last make her rouse herself and look up?"

"Why certainly, Morton, she ought to be obliged to him for that; for it caused her, for the moment at least, to look a thousand times lovelier than the very handsomest of her cousins. Yet, in my life, I never saw an eye expressive of so much gentle sadness. I am quite sure she is miserable."

"Then I am quite sure it is her own fault,"

replied Morton. "They are all as kind to her as possible, and I know perfectly well that she might have gone to fifty parties since she has been there, if she had not obstinately persisted in declaring that she preferred staying at home. It is impossible to force her to be amused and happy if she has pre-determined that she will not be so."

"That is very true, certainly. But it is painful to see it, nevertheless," said Wilmot.

"To be sure it is," answered his companion. "It is the greatest bore upon earth. All the Belmonts feel it, I assure you; and nothing but their charming, happy tempers could enable them to bear it as they do."

* * * * * *

The next day but one brought the following note from Mrs. Belmont to Mr. Morton:—

"*Tout va bien.* All difficulties have been conquered, and I have received *carte blanche* to do everything I like. What a blessing it is to have to deal with such a temper as Mr. Belmont's! We are excessively

busy, as you may suppose, and we want you and your friend to come and take your luncheon here at two precisely. I have ordered the door to be *défendue* against everyone else, and the coachman not to come near the house till half-past five, so that we shall have three hours good to decide upon words, costumes, and scenery. Of course, you will say everything you can think of to induce your friend to forgive and obey this hasty summons. My silly children are absolutely wild with delight.

"Yours very sincerely,

"CHARLOTTE BELMONT, the Elder.

This very agreeable summons was immediately communicated to Mr. Wilmot, who was exceedingly well pleased to receive it. He was an admirable charade-player, and, like the majority of his fellow-creatures, he took pleasure in doing what he was conscious he did well. The punctuality with which the friends knocked at Mr. Belmont's door precisely as the clock struck two, was quite exemplary, as was also that with which the

whole family were seen hurrying down stairs to the dining-room as they entered, in order that not a moment might be lost by idle drawing-room preliminaries.

Mary Bell was among the very first who appeared, but she was driven down the stairs by those who followed, with the same movement of their pretty fancy aprons, as they would have used if driving a flock of geese before them; not to mention that the two long-legged sons of the family were following also, with shouting assurances that, if she did not make haste, they would be upon her head; so it was with a quick, light step, that she bounded to the bottom of the flight, and Mr. Wilmot, as he greeted her with a gentle "Good morning, Miss Bell," had again the pleasure of seeing her beautiful eyes raised, and a blush upon her cheek, wonderfully resembling that of the wild rose.

In the dining-parlour, they found both Mr. and Mrs. Belmont, and the former was immediately introduced to Mr. Wilmot, as the dear, good man who had licensed the revels that they

were about to celebrate. Mr. Belmont was the comely prototype of his comely race. He was several years older than his wife, but it would have been difficult to find a handsomer man of sixty-four. His air, too, was as *gai et gaillard* as that of his sons, and his eye still laughed, and his well-formed mouth still smiled like theirs. Nothing could be more cordial and more kind than the welcome he gave to the new acquaintance thus presented to him.

"I am happy to see so promising a recruit added to Mrs. Belmont's troop," he said, "I like to patronise all these innocent joys, Mr. Wilmot. The argument which perpetually suggests itself in their favour whenever the subject is brought before me, is briefly this: Shall we ever be younger? If not, sir, if not, let us, in the name of common sense, catch the bright fleeting moments as they pass, and enjoy as much of frolic and of jest as the mercy of Providence shall be pleased to put within our reach."

And as he spoke, the excellent gentleman seated himself at the well-spread table, and

helping himself plenteously to some scolloped oysters, made it speedily evident that his grateful welcome of the gifts of Providence was not confined to matters of jest alone.

Excellent as it was, the luncheon was not permitted to last long, for the younger part of the company soon betrayed their impatience to get it over, that they might return to the drawing-room, and set about the business that was before them without further delay. And now again Mr. Belmont displayed an amiable trait of character; far from reproving the vehement eagerness which his lively children betrayed in the hasty and unceremonious manner in which they quitted the table, he only laughed, and drawing his well-stuffed arm-chair a little closer to the board, exclaimed, as he transferred the contents of a small, but very favourite dish, to his own plate—

"Away with ye! That's right! The fewer, you know, the better cheer. And as to the merriment, it will be time enough to look after that when I have taken a glass of sherry."

"What a heavenly temper!" said Mrs. Belmont to Mr. Morton, as they left the room.

The happy troop had no sooner reached the drawing-room, than Fanny exclaimed—

"Now for it, then! Words—words—words! Let everybody take a pencil and write down three words. Mamma says that each charade must be made as scenic, as perfectly dramatized, and as long as possible; and therefore that three will be quite sufficient for one evening. If we each write three words, that will give us twenty-four to choose from, and till this choice is made, mamma says it will be impossible to advance a single inch, for that of course the scenery and *all that* must depend upon it."

Everybody acknowledged the truth of this important proposition by a simultaneous exclamation of, "To be sure!" And the next moment everybody had a bit of writing-paper before them, and either a pencil, or a pen in their hand—everybody, save Mary Bell; and she seemed meditating a retreat, for she was very quickly stealing across the floor of the

front drawing-room, in the direction of the door.

"Are you looking for a pencil, Miss Bell?" said Wilmot, stepping quickly after her, and offering to put into her hands the pencil and paper he had prepared for himself—once again he caught a full view of her large melancholy eyes as she raised them to his face.

"Oh, no," she replied, softly, but quite audibly, "you will have more words, without my help, than you can want. I am very much obliged to you."

And Mary Bell was again moving on towards the door, with a step so rapid, notwithstanding its gliding quietness, that she had almost reached it, before Wilmot had recovered from his surprise at perceiving how very lovely she was when speaking, and that, exquisite as was her blush, her smile was more exquisite still. But he overtook her ere she had passed through it, and almost involuntarily taking her hand he said—

"Pray, Miss Bell, do not forsake us! You know that your aunt expects we should all be

useful. Do take the pencil!—you shall have your own little table, and nobody shall disturb you."

There was so judicious a mixture of respect and friendliness in the tone and manner of this address, that Mary Bell for a moment lost all her painful shyness, and looking at him with a smile that expressed both surprise and gratitude, she replied—

"I am sure you are very kind! But you do not know how very stupid I am."

Wilmot answered her only by a laugh, which was quite genuine, for it was impossible to look in the sweet face, beaming with intelligence, which was raised to his, and hear her in so very matter-of-fact a tone talk of her stupidity, without laughing;—but he led her back to the little table which he had seen her occupy, and laying down the pencil and the paper before her, glided away without saying another word, and availing himself without scruple of the free and easy tone which seemed, for the time being, to be established in "the troop," he sought and found another pencil and some

more paper, and was presently seated in the midst of the party, in deep meditation on the nature of words. But he was mistaken if he supposed that the little scene in which he had been engaged had passed without witnesses, or in fact, that any one of the persons present, except perhaps his friend Morton, had suffered a single circumstance of it to escape notice. The amusement which it occasioned was greater than can be easily expressed. That Mary—Mary Bell—should be taken by the hand, led to her chair, and waited upon by the handsomest and most distinguished-looking young man they had seen that season, had something in it so indescribably ludicrous to their feelings, that it was with the very greatest difficulty they avoided laughing aloud.

But they were aware this was not *bon ton.* They knew that Mr. Wilmot was Mr. Wilmot of Highfield Park, and though they had not as yet laid any very deliberate plan for taking possession of himself and his belongings, they were not so childish as to indulge in a laugh at his expense. All they did, therefore, under

the pressing necessity of yielding in some degree to the vehement merriment which had seized upon them, was done under cover of a multitude of devices, well known and constantly practised in all such lively families as that of the Belmonts.

One of them was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and blew her nose *con strepito*. Another hid herself completely behind one of her brothers, and relieved herself by pinching his arm with energy. The third knelt down, and pretended to be looking for something on the floor so minute as to render it necessary that her nose should come in contact with the carpet. One of the young men began to whistle with great shrillness, and the other to scold all his sisters at once, *à tort et à travers*, which last device was incomparably the best, as it quickly enabled them to laugh in return, and thus released them from the restraint which they found it so difficult to endure.

But by far the strongest *genuine* feeling produced by this unexpected procedure on the part of Mr. Wilmot was experienced by Mrs.

Belmont. She was, as of course she ought to be, considerably more advanced in the science of worldly wisdom than her children, although even on that score there was more talent already developed among them than could reasonably be expected at their age. But Mrs. Belmont, notwithstanding her charming spirits, and the graceful vivacity of her ordinary manners, had a good deal of foresight, and she would have been extremely well pleased to have seen the admiration which his eyes had already expressed for Fanny, demonstrated by as great assiduity as he had now displayed towards her stupid niece. As to the possibility of Mary Bell's profiting in any way by it, the idea was preposterous. She thought, indeed, that it was more than probable that the young man might be indulging in a little quiet quizzing after his own fashion; but, nevertheless, she would have been better pleased had he shown himself too much occupied by Fanny to think of anything else.

The family burst of merriment being over, they all proceeded to business, and a very

pretty picture might have been composed from the group. One fair girl sat with her beautiful eyes raised, in search of inspiration, to the ceiling. Another tapped her snowy forehead with a golden pencil-case; and where was the cynic who, as he watched her, could have dared to quote,

"Knock as you will, there's nobody at home."

The Conqueror frowned with an intensity that gave a sort of Jove-like air to his countenance, and Richard of the Lion Heart smiled as he meditated on his task, with the air of one who felt at home in his occupation. Mrs. Belmont wrote down two words with great rapidity, but weighed well the responsibility which the task threw upon her before she ventured upon a third. The two visitors did the same; but as to Fanny, who has not yet been mentioned, she was watching Mary Bell so earnestly, that her pencil had not as yet touched her paper. But she could not make her out. For an instant or two she had appeared to be using the pencil that had been

put into her hands, but then she laid it aside, resumed her work, and appeared to be again precisely in the same state of abstraction and isolation as usual.

"Well," said Mrs. Belmont, at length, "have we all done?"

"Yes," was uttered like a *feu de joie* by all the voices in succession, for the summons had quickened the tardy so effectually, that no one seemed greatly in arrear.

"Now, then, collect them, William, and read them all aloud, without hinting by any glance or sign from whence they come, and then we will proceed to selection."

This was done precisely as commanded; and then followed the clamour usual on such occasions, each one exclaiming in favour of some particular word, and dilating, *à haute voix*, on the facilities it offered for scenic effect. After this had lasted for some time, it became evident that out of the twenty-seven words (if, indeed, Mary Bell's bit of paper contained any) four were the decided favourites. Of these, two were declared by acclamation to be quite

first-rate; but, concerning the other two, there was evidently a difference of opinion. These doubtful words were INCUBUS and INFANTICIDE. Whether William Belmont (the reader) knew whence they came may be doubtful, but certainly no one else did, save their respective authors. Opinions, therefore, were given on all sides, with perfect freedom; and Mrs. Belmont, with a degree of quickness which showed her to be admirably well calculated for the part of manager, ran through the dramatic capabilities of both in a masterly manner, showing how scene might follow scene, and the whole end with splendid effect. But though she declared both words to be very good, she very decidedly gave the preference to *infanticide*, while nearly all the rest of the speakers gave their judgment in favour of the other.

After a pretty stout contest for her own word—for it was, in fact, one of those she had given in—Mrs. Belmont at length yielded to the majority, and *incubus* was decided upon, and then the scraps of paper were spread out upon the table, and every one was desired to

select his own, a process resorted to for the purpose of consulting the author as to any former experience he might have had concerning the management of the word. The command was immediately obeyed by every one except Mary Bell, who, as usual, remained stationary at her little table. She had remained so entirely silent during the previous discussion, that it is probable every one, not excepting her new friend, Charles Wilmot, had forgotten that she had been invited to write; but when every one had selected his own, and that one scrap of paper was still found remaining, Wilmot immediately stepped forward, seized upon it, and carried it to her, but not without reading aloud, as he went along, the word INCUBUS.

Mary Bell looked up for an instant as he placed the paper before her, blushed, smiled, bent her head in acknowledgment of his attention, and then once more resumed her occupation.

"*Imaginez!*" cried Fanny, turning to her mother with a look of astonishment.

"*Imaginez*, indeed," responded her mother; "but to me it will be quite a relief to find that the farce of excessive shyness is at an end. There is nothing I detest like it!".

Then crossing the room to the remote spot occupied by her niece, she said—

"I am glad to see, Mary Bell, that you think it is time to leave off your village *sauvagerie*, and to permit yourself to be amused with what amuses the rest of us. But you must please to remember, my dear, that I shall not exactly approve your refusing to do everything I ask you, while you display the most ready compliance with the requests of the first handsome young man who takes notice of you. Your papa would not approve of that, I can promise you. So now, remember, that you will be expected to go through with these charades like the rest of the party, and do whatever may happen to be required of you, with the same ready goodwill as your cousins."

Having said this, she returned to the group who were now assembled in the back drawing-

room, and ere it separated, the arrangement for the first charade had been fully decided upon.

It really seemed very likely that Fanny Belmont would prove right, and that the practising charades *must* be more delightful still than the acting them, for it was hardly possible to conceive that any occupation could prove as agreeable as that which now brought all the family together into the drawing-rooms the moment that breakfast was over, with the addition of the two young men enlisted in their service, and who gave the best proof that they found that service pleasant, by constantly arriving at the moment appointed, though that moment was rather an early one. Mrs. Belmont, though a queer woman in some respects, was quite wise enough to know that such a degree of intimacy as these daily meetings must inevitably produce, could not safely be permitted with everybody, and accordingly she had taken care to inform herself very accurately who and what the Mr. Wilmot was, who, from having evidently been much used

to the amusement, was confessed by the whole company to be the most accomplished actor among them. All her inquiries tended to prove that no lady, having three daughters to marry, could have been more fortunate in the choice of a playfellow for them.

Charles Wilmot had a pretty little unencumbered estate of five thousand a-year, was nearly connected with more than one noble family, had just left the university with the reputation of high talent and excellent character; and, though last, not least in the catalogue of his perfections, if he did happen to fall in love, he was perfectly at liberty to indulge his fancy, for he was not only fatherless, motherless, and of age, but had no relation, either male or female, who would have thought themselves justified in advising him under any such circumstances to take care what he was about. As to William Morton, his race and expectations had for some time been well known to every member of the Belmont family. If a certain uncle, still unmarried, continued to live, and happened to die a

bachelor, William Morton would, of necessity, become a wealthy baronet; a contingency which was considered as quite sufficient to justify his rehearsing love scenes with all the Miss Belmonts in turn. So the practising went on charmingly, and not the less so because Mrs. Belmont appeared to have given up her threatened persecution of Mary Bell;—for either she had forgotten her altogether as a created thing who could have no more to do with charade-acting than a table or chair; or else the apparition of the momentary gleam of bright intelligence which had startled all the family *was remembered*, and the provident mother thought that it might be quite as well she should continue stitching at the little table behind the sofa in the front drawing-room.

This state of things went on for three long delightful mornings, during which the characters of the first part had been imagined and allotted, and the progress of the dialogue sketched out. INCUBUS was, at the particular request of Mr. Wilmot, the word chosen for the first performance, and of this the first act

was to be an inn. No landlord could be mustered, but Mrs. Belmont had consented to enact the part of landlady, conscious, from the result of the quick counsel called in her secret heart, that the costume might easily be made exceedingly becoming to her handsome face and person, without at all losing sight of the character. Morton undertook to be a waiter, who should appear with the proper jerk as often as he was called for; and, moreover, undertake, by the opportunities afforded in his official capacity, to satisfy the curiosity of a sentimental traveller (Wilmot) concerning a mysterious young lady, who, with her maid, had been for some days occupying an apartment at the inn, with a very evident wish for concealment. Richard was to be this young lady's choleric father, who should arrive at the inn in search of her in the disguise of a pedlar, and sing the song of Autolycus. The mysterious lady was to be personated by Fanny, Margaret readily undertaking the part of the maid, tempted thereto by Morton's saying that he must have a coaxing, love-making sort of

scene with the *soubrette*, for the purpose of finding out who the mysterious lady might be. Charlotte was well contented to enact the "fair maid of the inn," thinking that it would enable her to be as coquettish in costume, style, and manner, as her heart could wish. William Belmont was to be a detestable old bachelor, intended for the young lady's husband by her tyrannical father. All this was quite perfect, and it was clear to everybody that no more parts could be invented, and that poor Mary Bell might be left in peace.

The first arranging the plot, made a very busy morning indeed, for there was the usual fear in everybody that they would not have enough to do. Therefore during the whole of that period, the fact of Mary Bell's having absented herself from the drawing-rooms altogether, was scarcely remarked, and not at all commented upon by any one. On the second, the order of exits and entrances was settled; and on the third, the respective characters slightly muttered over what they intended to say, and the attitudes, and the taking of

hands, and the tapping of shoulders, were canvassed and practised. This part of the business required a great deal of consultation, and considerable repetition, before anything like a decision was arrived at, as to how it should be.

But at length, however, it was all declared to be quite right and proper; and then arose considerable doubts and uncertainty as to the second syllable. Nobody had thought about it when they seized upon *inn*, always a favourite, and convertible to anything, or they might have divided it otherwise, and made it *ink* and *you*—(spelling was unanimously declared to be of no consequence). But it was too late now, for it was quite impossible to give up what had been so beautifully arranged; and so, after long pondering, it was determined that one of the girls should run up-stairs, and bring down Mary Bell, who certainly would not have ventured to write the word had she not heard of its being performed. Margaret, the messenger, had found her cousin very contentedly engaged with a book in the

little attic assigned to her use; but coming from her mother, armed with all the power of the word *must*, she despatched her business very quickly, and returned to the drawing-room accompanied by Mary Bell.

"What did you ever see made of the second syllable of *incubus*, Mary Bell?" said her aunt, as she entered. "We have taken *inn* for the first, of course."

"The word *cue*, or the letter Q," replied Mary Bell.

"Very well, my dear, that will do," returned her aunt, with a nod of dismissal; and Mary Bell turned to leave the room.

"Stay a moment, *belle Marie*," exclaimed William Belmont. "May not Mary Bell stay and have to perform the part of audience, mother?" he added; "we really want some one to tell us, in the parts where we are all engaged together, whether we are right or wrong."

"May? To be sure she may if she likes it," replied Mrs. Belmont. "Do you suppose, Sir Conqueror, that I desired her to take herself off? Indeed, I did recollect the advantage of

having a looker-on, but did not feel quite certain that Mary Bell would like to be useful. But, of course we shall be greatly obliged to her if she will."

"Indeed I will be useful if I can," replied Mary Bell, with more animation of manner than she had ever found courage to display before, since her arrival in Bolton-street.

"Very well, then, sit down in that chair," said Mrs. Belmont. "That, I take it, will be just the best place in the house, and it is there we must put Lady Montravers, if we can get her, for you know she is a critic *par excellence*. Sit down there, Mary Bell, and keep your eye steadily fixed upon us. You must be careful not to look off, because, if you do, it will be of no use at all sitting there. What we want is to know whether we seem to leave any awkward pauses, and also whether we appear to hurry through the business too much. Do you understand?"

"Yes, aunt, I think so," replied Mary Bell, conscious, however, as she said so, that she should never have courage to tell any of them

they were wrong. And then the important question was put as to whether Q or *cue* should be chosen. The possibility of having an ironing board covered with a green cloth put upon the scene, to represent a billiard-table, was warmly canvassed, and Charlotte remembered taking a lesson once from Lord Somebody Something upon playing with a cue instead of a mace, and she was fully aware how many very good attitudes might be introduced; so she voted for *cue* and the billiard-table, and said she was quite ready to undertake the scene, and that she and the waiter might amuse themselves in this way without the least violation of probability. The waiter elect seconded the proposal with great eloquence, declaring that the scene would be exceedingly effective, and highly comic, but Mrs. Belmont objected strongly to the difficulty of setting up the billiard-table.

"Really, dear mamma," remonstrated Charlotte, "one would think there was not a servant in the house. You know we are to have a curtain, and anything, you know, may be done

behind the curtain." This sally was received with a loud laugh by the young lady's lively brothers, and, after a little more discussion, Mrs. Belmont yielded to the general opinion, that a billiard-table would make an admirable scene, and *cue* was decided on as the second syllable, Wilmot stipulating, however, that to prevent the entire action from being too much suspended during this second act, the father should arrive in the course of it, and break up the game by a vehement demand for his lost daughter. Then the syllable *bus* was taken as the familiar diminutive of *omnibus*, and the young lady, informed of her father's arrival, determined, with the assistance of the amiable, but unknown Wilmot, to escape by means of this humble vehicle, the approach of which was to be announced by the waiter. But the old man rushes in, separates Fanny and Wilmot, and the *bus* is employed to carry her away.

In the last scene, the tyrannical father was to be discovered restlessly asleep on a couch. Troubled dreams torment him, and a species of nightmare, springing on his chest, tortures

him awhile, and he awakes, fully persuaded that the devil had been sent to punish him, and in the terror this idea occasions, he consents to the marriage of his daughter with Wilmot, who turns out to be a gentleman of high degree. All this went vastly well, and seemed to offer sufficient opportunity for acting. But there was one difficulty which seemed to puzzle them all. How and by whom was the INCUBUS to be enacted?"

"Did you ever see this done, Mary Bell?" demanded Mrs. Belmont, suddenly addressing her niece.

"Yes, aunt," was the reply.

"And how was the Incubus represented?"

"By a child, dressed in black, with great red eyes, and a large pair of horns," said Mary Bell.

"Delicious!" exclaimed the party, almost in general chorus.

"Delicious," said Mrs. Belmont, shaking her head dolefully; "but where are we to find a child capable of doing it?"

"I am sure I don't know," responded Charlotte, knitting her brows.

"Oh, mother, a child would be such a horrid bore. I have not the least doubt in the world but that the little wretch would choke me," cried Richard Belmont, "and besides the terror I should be in for my life," he added, "only imagine what a plague it would be to have a horrid little spy of a creature admitted behind the scenes, who would be sure to gabble all sorts of tales when he got home again, which would as surely travel through the whole circle of our acquaintance, and render the whole thing a failure. I shall positively refuse to act if any children are admitted behind the scenes."

As most of the party agreed with him in this prejudice against receiving assistance from the shooting ideas of the younger part of the creation, all thoughts of an infant *incubus* was abandoned, and the blank-looking party stood in a circle, in great doubt and difficulty as to a substitute.

"Could it not be done by machinery?" said Mr. Morton.

"Yes, to be sure it could," cried the lion-hearted Richard; "what should prevent it?"

"I am afraid the expense might be considerable, Richard," said his mother, looking a little grave.

"Nonsense, my dear mother!" he replied. "You don't suppose I want to have something as delicate in its movement as a watch, do you? Why I have seen at school a hundred things made to jump as high as the incubus need do. I will speak to the carpenter about it. Let us go on now as if the incubus part of the business was done. Trust to me for it."

He was gladly obeyed; everything did go on and all the better, certainly, for having Mary Bell to look at them; for no sooner did she see reason to believe that her aunt's threats concerning the necessity of her being useful had no object more terrible than the making her sit still, and look on, than she became extremely anxious to be of service to them in reality, and having luckily witnessed, while yet but a child, a good many performances of the same kind at a merry-making mansion near her home, she was able to give many hints

that were really of importance. As the business went on, and the second and third charades were formed, her courage increased, because not a word was said about her being expected to act. She no longer kept her eyes fixed either upon her needle or the floor, nor did she tremble as heretofore at the sound of her own voice. There was something in the very nature of the office assigned her that seemed congenial to her spirit.

A sweeter-tempered creature never lived than Mary Bell; and though her constitutional shyness had of late been irritated by the eternal quizzing—nay, mockery, of her cousins, into an almost morbid desire of escaping observation, the idea of being useful to others made her forget herself, and released her for a time from that terrible sensitiveness which genuine shyness produces, and which is probably more painful in its effects than those who have never suffered from it can easily imagine. The great source of Mary Bell's present relief from this suffering, however, did not so much

arise from her own increased courage; as from the total absorption of all the faculties of all her cousins in preparing themselves for exhibition. Mary Bell had been the standing joke of the family ever since she entered the house, and never had the shafts of their boasted wit wanted an object since she had been within their reach. But now they had no time for *fun*, no leisure to invent *accidents* which should make Mary Bell look like a fool. All the energies of their nature were devoted to appearing to the greatest possible advantage in their charades, and Mary Bell was often blushing from pleasure, instead of shyness, without their being at all aware of it.

The individual who beyond all comparison enjoyed all these rehearsals the most, was Charles. Wilmot. Though by no means addicted to what the Belmont family called fun, he was very fond of amusement, and these charades amused him in many ways. He had a remarkable power both of conceiving character and representing it; and the graceful facility with which he could *improviser* a part was quite extraordinary. Without being at

all a vain man, he liked greatly to exercise this power, it was a great amusement to him; and, moreover, it was very pleasant to feel himself of such great importance to the troop as he was speedily made aware of being. The three Miss Belmonts were very handsome, and being constantly the object of attention and admiration to three very handsome girls can scarcely ever be disagreeable to any young man of five-and-twenty. But this was not all that Charles Wilmot had to interest, to charm, to enchant him. Who has not felt the value of a smile from those who smile rarely? Who has not felt the strange, mysterious attraction of extreme reserve when it relaxes into gentle kindness of manner towards themselves? It was impossible to watch the versatile talents of Wilmot as Mary Bell now did, without being charmed by them; and it was equally so for a young girl who believed herself and her observations to be totally overlooked amidst the busy interest of what was going on, to keep such watchful guard over her countenance as to prevent its expression from being read by

one who, despite his occupation, had still leisure enough to watch it keenly.

Little did Mary Bell think that every smile that brightened her eye, and dimpled round her mouth—nay, almost every thought that arose within her innocent heart—was seen, noted, and deeply cared for, by Charles Wilmot. He was exceedingly well satisfied, and considerably pleased, by the undisguised admiration which flashed from the bright eyes of Fanny Belmont, but he was touched to the very soul by the unconscious involuntary repetition of it, which he read in those of Mary Bell. When Charlotte smiled upon him in approval, till she showed her magnificent teeth from ear to ear, he smiled at her in return, and each felt the pleasant consciousness of being thought exceedingly charming by the other; but when his eye caught the soft, sweet smile of Mary Bell, nothing but his watchful care not to bring upon her, and himself conjointly, the observation of the family, prevented him from being at her side in a moment to ask her why she smiled, and whether

she thought his conception of his character right or wrong. When the bright cheek of Margaret became brighter still, as he acted with her, he thought her very lovely, and liked his occupation all the better for giving him the opportunity of looking at her; but if a blush mantled the soft cheek of Mary Bell as her eye met his, he longed to throw himself at her feet, and confess at last that it was to please her and her only, that he exerted himself.

And could Mary Bell be quite unconscious of all this? No; not quite. There was enough of talent, enough of attraction in Charles Wilmot to touch the heart of any girl (if fancy-free) who had reason to believe that she had touched his. But, alas! too greatly was the charm increased in the case of Mary Bell. She was surrounded by all the nearest relations she had in the world, save her father, and to all, and each of them, she felt and knew herself to be an object of contempt and ridicule. She never met the eye of either of them without reading in it something of reproof or of

mockery. Her cousin William, indeed, often told her that she would be devilish handsome, if she would leave off being so cursedly shy; but there was so much more of insult than of compliment in this, that she shrank from him with more repugnance than from either of the others, and would rather at any time have met the biting ridicule of the bright-eyed Fanny than the offensive compliments of her brother.

Dangerous, indeed, was the contrast which the manners of Wilmot offered to all this, and the poor stranger felt it in her heart of hearts. Not that she dared to hope that Wilmot loved her. The very utmost flight of all the vanity in her composition could not carry her to such a height of presumption; but she was sure he pitied her; she was sure that he understood her feelings, though nobody else did, and that he did not consider shyness as precisely the same as mental imbecility: she was sure that he took pleasure, great pleasure, in seeing her amused by his performance; she was almost sure that he took more pleasure in pleasing her than anybody else. How angelic must be

the mind in which pity could thus triumph over vanity! Mary Bell thought that she could never feel too grateful for such exceeding kindness, and thus, almost as a matter of duty, her gentle young heart melted away till every feeling was centred and absorbed in love. And that Charles Wilmot loved her, tenderly loved her in return, is most certain. In fact, he loved her even more than he was himself aware of, for his mind was at ease upon the subject. He saw plainly enough, and strange would it have been had he not, the effect produced upon her feelings by the contrast of his manner towards her with that of all others who surrounded her; he knew that he was loved; he knew, too, that neither the Bolton-street aunt, nor the naval father, could find any reasonable objection to his alliance, and therefore reposed himself in perfect security upon a happy future, which required no anxious cares on his part to bring to fruition.

The time he had fixed upon in his own mind for declaring his affection was the return of Captain Bell from his cruise; and in thus delaying

it there was both kindness and discretion; kindness, because he feared that, did he make known his attachment while she continued in Bolton-street, her aunt and cousins would infallibly find means to turn the happiness he hoped to bestow into torment of some kind or other; and discretion, because he wisely remembered that having no living parent, or other near relation to assist his judgment in the all important matter of choosing a wife, it became his duty not to be over hasty in deciding finally, and for ever, upon a point so vitally important to his happiness. And thus, in the very fullest enjoyment of hope as reasonable as it was delightful, his fancy amused, his talents displayed, his vanity gratified, his tenderest feelings excited, yet his heart completely fearless and at ease, it can hardly be doubted that Wilmot enjoyed the month of practising most vividly.

With intentions so generous,—so honourable,—so far beyond all that the very highest hopes of Mary Bell had ever suggested, how is it possible to say that Wilmot was acting other-

wise than well and nobly? It would be unjust to say so, inasmuch as every thought and purpose of his heart was good. Yet there was a greater mixture of selfishness in the happiness he was enjoying than he at all suspected. Had he endeavoured a little to put himself in the place of Mary Bell—had he endeavoured to guess how she felt, as silent, apart, and often unnoticed for hours together, she watched his lively spirits display themselves in unnumbered gay and gallant sayings and doings with her happy cousins,—had he done this, he might perhaps have perceived that it was possible his intended wife was less perfectly happy than she might have been had his cautiousness been a little less, and his anxiety about her present feelings a little greater.

Time galloped gaily along, however, with the charade-players, and the day for which the exhibition was fixed was rapidly approaching, yet still the means of performing the last scene of *incubus* had not appeared. Richard Belmont had told them to "trust him," and they had done so rather longer, as it seemed, than

was prudent, for a few days only remained for the "practising," yet still the contrivance he had promised was not forthcoming. Nothing could be better than the whole of Richard Belmont's performance of the agonies of a guilty man struggling with troubled dreams, and had the representation been a drama instead of a charade, there would have been no more occasion for an incubus to appear bodily upon the scene, than for the ghost of Banquo to appear at the table of Macbeth. But in a charade, it was clearly necessary that an *incubus* as visible to the eye as to the mind should be brought upon the scene, or the verbal catastrophe would be abortive.

"Confound the fellow!" exclaimed Richard, having once again gone through the part, and the very next day being that fixed for the dressed rehearsal. "He swore by all the gods that a carpenter could invoke, that his confounded skip-jack should be here this morning." These words were scarcely uttered when the only servant permitted to approach the theatrical premises, knocked at the door, and an-

nounced the arrival of the anxiously expected mechanist. He was ordered to appear, and did so instantly, bearing in his hand a something of very mysterious ugliness of form, which by the judicious use of a little cobbler's wax, could be made to spring to a very considerable height. The first performance of the little monster was hailed with a perfect shriek of admiration and delight; and then the guilty Richard laid himself once more upon his restless couch, and bade the tormentor do his worst. Again the cobbler's wax was judiciously applied, and again the hideous little figure sprang into the air; but instead of perching on the breast of the conscience-stricken Richard, it bounded pretty nearly in the opposite direction.

"That wont do, my good fellow!" cried the sleeper, starting up, "you could not have set it in the right direction." The experiment was repeated, and the thing sprang backwards head over heels, very decidedly in the direction of the couch; but as to taking its station upon Richard's breast, no such purpose or such power appeared to exist in its wires. Again and

again the experiment was repeated, but always with the same result, till at length it became evident to the whole party that it was impossible to direct its movements with sufficient accuracy to render it available. The disappointment produced by this failure was so great that Mrs. Belmont was unwilling that the astonished carpenter should witness it, and the man was hastily dismissed. And then it was really piteous to hear the exclamations of despair which burst from the troop, of late so enviable in their happiness.

"Good heaven!" cried poor Mrs. Belmont, "what can I do? After such immense trouble, so much expense, and such expectations raised on all sides! This *contre-temps* is really terrible!"

Nobody could comfort her. Everybody felt that every word she said was true, and that instead of exaggeration she had not half expressed the extent of the disappointment which had fallen upon them. Fanny sat down in a corner, and actually appeared to be weeping, till Mr. Wilmot, who, the more firmly he felt

himself devoted to Mary Bell, the more carefully avoided a premature discovery of his feelings, with his usual forgetfulness of what *she* might think or feel in the interval, repaired with every appearance of assiduity, to the side of her most admired cousin, and appeared to be whispering words of comfort in her ear, with a degree of earnestness that was really affectionate. It might fill many a page to tell all the anguish, the vehemently resisted, but still unconquerable anguish which wrung the heart of the unhappy Mary as she witnessed this seeming devotion. How vainly did she tell herself that she had no right to suffer! How vainly did she confess to her contrite heart, that could all the world see her agonies, there would not be one, save her poor devoted father, who would not blame instead of pitying her. Oh, why had Wilmot ever drawn her heart, her soul, her long-schooled humble spirit from the shade in which they had contentedly nestled themselves for life? Mary Bell felt that it would have been very bitter to have listened to professions of love from Charles Wilmot,

and then to have found those professions false; but, as it now seemed to her, this misery would have been nothing in comparison to that of knowing that she had given her love unsought, and had now to watch the proof that it was unwished for and unvalued. Poor Mary Bell! She did the hearts of her fellow-creatures injustice in thinking that none would pity her, for but few could have known what she felt and have refused to do so.

But nobody did know what she felt, poor little soul, and while she was engaged in torturing herself as much as possible, at one end of the room, Charles Wilmot was exerting himself strenuously at the other, in order to advance his own particular scheme of operations. He had fancied once or twice of late that the bright eyes of Fanny had followed him rather too curiously when he had yielded to the temptation of walking off the stage and across the room to say a few words to Mary Bell, on some pretence or other, for the purpose of indulging himself with the sight of her eyes raised to his face—and he was quite

right. Fanny had observed him very curiously. Not above a week of the practising month had elapsed, ere this lively young lady had decided on seriously completing the conquest of Mr. Wilmot's heart, and permitting him, in due time, to become the lawful master of her destiny. It might, perhaps, have made some trifling difference in her speculations had she been aware that the remarkable brilliance of talent displayed by the young man, and his greatly increased air of happy gaiety, arose not, as she supposed, from the felicity of being perpetually within reach of the eyes to which he had more than once alluded in her hearing, but entirely to the full contentment ensuing upon having made up his mind, beyond the reach of any further harassing doubts, to take the neglected Mary Bell for his wife.

But most assuredly she had no such stuff in her thoughts, and it was only within the last few days that she had taken it into her head to fancy that Mary Bell was putting herself ridiculously in Charles Wilmot's way, contriving somehow or other to make him speak to

her whether he wished it or not. Such a notion as this could not by possibility enter the head of such a young lady as Miss Fanny Belmont, especially when she was beginning to fancy herself very violently in love (for not more than the twentieth time in her life) without producing some troublesome results. A rapid soliloquy, mentally uttered, as she watched Wilmot's sudden approach to Mary Bell, during the noisy moment which followed the entrance of the carpenter, may shew what sort of results were probable in the present case. The eye that followed his movement was indeed bright, brighter perhaps than ever, but it could scarcely be called beautiful, for it boded no good to those it fell upon.

"If I believed it possible—if I only believed it possible," thought she, "that Mary Bell was such an artful little demon as to endeavour to shew him that she is not so great a fool as she looks, and not quite so hideously ugly and vulgar as she appears to the world in general—if I could only believe this possible, I would teach her to know her place in

a manner she should not soon forget. But, no! I have caught him—I know it, I am sure of it. These detestable mutterings only arise from a silly sort of good-nature on his part, which makes him fancy it amiable to notice her, because nobody else has patience to do it. But I know how charmingly gay and beautiful, the little idiot looks when she is laughed at, and it shall not be my fault if she does not put some of these peculiar graces in practice before the eyes of Wilmot."

While these soft thoughts were revolving in the mind of the bright-eyed Fanny, the total discomfiture of all hope from the incubus of the carpenter was completed, the man dismissed, and the company left in the state of despair that has been already described—Fanny exaggerating her sorrow, till it seemed to relieve itself in tears, and brought Wilmot to her side as we have related.

He whispered, he smiled, he took her hand. Fanny sent a rapid glance across the room, and looked at Mary Bell. The eyes that were wont to "love the ground," were now fixed,

intently fixed, upon her and Wilmot, and their expression, for that one instant, was too full of woe to be mistaken.

"Indeed!" whispered the heart, but not the lips of Fanny; "it is so, is it? Then I must mind what I am about."

Meanwhile, Richard, who, though treating the matter as he did everything else, very lightly, felt that he was not only the responsible person upon this occasion, but also the one whose acting would be the most affected unless the loss of the mechanical incubus were in some way supplied, was eagerly turning in his thoughts every possible device for the purpose, and at length starting up, he walked over to his mother, still occupied in deploring his unhappy condition, and whispered a few words in her ear. She listened attentively, and started as he went on, as if some new and striking idea had been suggested to her. He then left her and applied himself to the hopping-machine which the carpenter had left, as if still intent upon examining its capabilities. Mrs. Belmont meanwhile walked over to Mary Bell, and touching her on the shoulder, made

a sign that she should follow her to the most distant window of the front drawing-room. Having reached it, she placed her with her back towards the party they had left, and thus addressed her:

"Mary Bell, you see the utter destruction that has fallen upon all our schemes in consequence of this disappointment. You must be conscious that you are in a great degree answerable for this, because of your having thought proper to give us so unmanageable a word, and therefore I think you must feel that it is your duty to get us out of the scrape. It is now quite impossible to give up the charade, on account of the great expense we have been at in preparing it; your uncle, with all his sweet temper, would never forgive me, and, depend upon it, he would never forgive you. The only way to remedy this is by your undertaking the part yourself."

"Aunt!" gasped Mary Bell, in reply; and it was the only word she uttered.

"Now, do not try my patience too severely, Mary Bell!" resumed Mrs. Belmont, in a low,

deep whisper, and with an emphasis that might truly have startled a less timid spirit than that of Mary Bell, "I really am in no state to be trifled with. I tell you, Mary Bell, that you will be guilty of a great crime if you refuse me. I stand here as the representative of your father, and I command you to do what I require."

"Heaven help me!" exclaimed the poor girl, pressing her hand upon her forehead in great agony; "what is it you require of me?"

"What?—a mere nothing, child—not the thousandth part of the exertion that I and all your cousins are making for the general amusement; and certainly it will be the most abominable piece of selfishness that ever was practised, if you refuse—but it is impossible you *can* refuse. It would be perfectly diabolical, and for your dear father's sake I will not believe it possible."

"But what is it you would have me do?" repeated the poor girl, her lips trembling, and her complexion as white as marble.

"Come with me, my dear child," replied

Mrs. Belmont, with sudden kindness of manner, and passing her arm under that of her niece, to lead her back to the party. "Come with me, and you will find that we shall all be ready enough to contrive that it shall be made as little troublesome to you as possible. And besides, you know, it will last but for an instant, and you have not a word to utter."

"But what is it I am to do?—what?—what?" reiterated Mary Bell, in a voice of anguish, as she remembered the hundred and fifty guests whose eyes were to be fixed upon her.

"Do not be so dreadfully affected, child," returned her aunt, "and think so very much more of yourself than anybody else does. Upon my word it looks very much as if you were trying to set your cap at some particular person, and hoped to draw his attention by all these grimaces. Perhaps you expect that Mr. Wilmot, for instance, may fall in love with your excessive modesty? But you had better let all that alone, Mary Bell. Your good father would by no means approve it, I can tell you."

Mary Bell now yielded unresistingly to the impulse of her aunt's arm. Had she been leading her to the edge of a precipice for the avowed purpose of throwing her over it, she would have done the same.

"Your cousin, Mary Bell, is willing to help you," said Mrs. Belmont, as they approached the party. "Nothing can be easier, you know, than for her to perform the part which she describes the child as having taken, in the representation she saw of a charade on this tiresome word."

"Oh, what a dear, good girl!" exclaimed Charlotte. "How very kind of her. I declare I did not believe she had half good-nature enough to do any such thing."

"Oh, yes! Mary Bell can be very good-natured when she chooses it," said Margaret, laughing. "Remember how promptly she wrote down her three words, before any one of us had began ours. But then to be sure, it was a gentleman who asked her, and that makes a difference sometimes. However, it is mamma that has done it now, and nobody can laugh at Mary Bell for that."

"Laugh at her, indeed! I am sure we are all excessively obliged to her," said Richard, coming forward with an air of more civility, and less mockery, than he had ever before used in addressing her.

"But please to observe," cried William Belmont, "that there is a great deal to be done yet before she can be ready. There is the dress to be thought of and to be made; and besides, she will have to practise."

"We all know how fond Mary Bell is of stitching," said Richard, relaxing a little from his gratitude into his usual tone; "so I shall recommend her setting to work instantly, and manufacturing her infernal costume herself."

"But will Miss Bell really have to manufacture her own horns?" demanded Morton, who had by this time become the pet of the whole family, from his happy propensity to joke-making. This sally about the horns delighted them all so greatly, and the image of Mary Bell assiduously preparing her own monstrosities, appeared to them so irresistibly comic, that notwithstanding the pressure of business at the moment, they one and all

burst forth into a paroxysm of laughter, in which Morton joined as heartily as his modesty, at having produced it, would let him. Fanny, meanwhile, was doing *l'impossible* to keep Wilmot by her side, and to prevent him, as much as might be, from perceiving what was going on, till the hapless Mary Bell had gone too far to recede. She was making him hold one end of a wreath of flowers that she was adding to at the other, and his leaving it would evidently have been fatal to the operation. She had contrived, too, so to place him, that his back was turned towards the stage, and the party assembled on it; but when this burst of laughter caught his ear, he turned round, and his eye instantly catching the figure of Mary Bell in the midst of the party, though her pale face was in another direction, he inquired rather eagerly what was the cause of their mirth.

"I am glad you can leave Fanny for one single moment," exclaimed Margaret, "for I think we shall want your assistance yet, before we shall actually be able to set Mary Bell at

work. We have none of us forgotten the instantaneous effect of the gold pencil-case which you put into her hands when we were writing words. And now, if you please, Mr. Wilmot, we want you to put a steel-needle into her hands in exactly the same fascinating manner, for we want her to go to work without losing a moment."

This speech produced, perhaps, more than its desired effect both on Wilmot and Mary Bell. He instantly determined that he would not be driven by the detestable vivacity of Miss Margaret into abandoning the scheme he had laid down for himself, of keeping them all in ignorance of his intentions till the return of his beloved's father; delighting in the idea of carrying her off from among them, as his bride, before they had recovered from their horror and astonishment upon finding upon which of the party his choice had fallen;—for Charles Wilmot was not at all more blind than other young gentlemen of five thousand a year, to the extent of the field from among which he might have chosen without danger

of rejection. No, nothing, he was quite determined, should induce him to abandon this scheme; and in order to avoid the danger of being tempted to betray himself, by interfering with too evident an interest in what was going on—which he doubted not was some new jest against his love, for the endurance of which she should soon be rewarded by unbounded happiness—to avoid this danger, he gently placed his end of the wreath between Fanny's fingers, and left the room. On Mary Bell, the effect of Margaret's words were more powerful still. The opening phrase, "I am glad you can leave Fanny for a single moment," seemed to carry an arrow of fire through her heart; while those which followed, hinting at his influence upon herself, instantly determined her to do and to suffer whatever was proposed to her by her aunt and cousins, to prevent the possibility of seeming to be influenced by him.

"You have half killed poor Wilmot!" said Fanny, as soon as the door closed behind him. "The idea of seeing Mary Bell performing with horns and a tail, is too much, and he has

run away to enjoy a laugh that he thought it would be too rude to indulge in here."

The bright-eyed Fanny, it must be observed, had *her* face turned towards the party, and therefore was perfectly aware of all that had been going on, though Wilmot had not.

"Let us have a joke against Wilmot!" said Richard. "Don't let him know anything more about Mary Bell's acting than he does now, which I dare say he will forget when his laugh is over. It will be such good fun to see him stare when he sees her dressed up as a devil."

This proposal was highly approved by the whole party, whose spirits were quite *in alt* again, at the idea of having conquered their difficulties, and Mary Bell was charged not to say a single word before him for her life. For *her life?* Could her life only have been sacrificed, by her letting him know what was going on, he would not have been long ignorant of it—no, not though the piercing eyes of Fanny had been fixed on her as she betrayed it. But would they not have said that "*she was en-*

deavouring to draw his attention by her grimaces?" This would have been worse than death, and this she was determined to avoid, let it cost her what it might.

Mrs. Belmont very judiciously decided that Mary Bell's own needle should not be the one employed to fabricate the dress that was to envelop her; and one of the women who had been for many days employed in making the theatrical costumes of the party was set to work upon it. Nothing could be more ludicrous than the effect of the horns and fiery eyes. The tail, still strongly advocated by Fanny, was out-voted by the rest, who, probably fearing that the poor girl might resist this addition, proposed that her body should be enveloped in a black and flame-coloured mantle, with nothing of monstrosity visible but the head. Richard judiciously pointed out to his cousin the completeness of the disguise, observing, that nobody could possibly find out whether it was a woman or a boy who performed it. This was evidently true; and though trembling in every joint, Mary Bell

repeated her promise of appearing in it, only making the condition that she was to lay her hands upon his breast, and not to attempt the spring which had been previously proposed. After a little opposition, which they all pretty well knew would be in vain, this variation was agreed to; and at length, everything being completed, the dressed rehearsal took place on the evening preceding that fixed for the public performance. At this rehearsal Mary Bell was not present; an omission the more readily excused by the manager, because her dress was not completely ready, and gladly acceded to by the rest, for the sake of the *fun* they expected from witnessing Wilmot's puzzle, when the performance took place, as to who it was, at last, who was performing the Incubus. This indulgence enabled Mary Bell to absent herself entirely, and go to bed—and greatly was she in want of that relief; for her struggles and agitation had made her very seriously ill, and, had they felt her pulse, they might have doubted of their Incubus for the morrow.

At length, that longed-for morrow came; the stage looked beautiful; the dresses were perfect; the performers in the highest possible spirits, and the company punctual, beyond the most sanguine hopes of the anxious manager; but Mary Bell had not yet appeared in the green-room. Wilmot, who had been looking forward with no little delight to the exciting hurry and bustle of the performance, as likely to give him more opportunity than he had ever yet enjoyed of addressing from time to time a few words to his beloved, without being very strictly watched as he thus indulged himself, began to feel a little fidgety at her absence; and at last, under shelter of his well-practised indifference of voice and manner, he ventured to say, "Will not Miss Bell come amongst us? I think she might be useful in many ways, though she does not act."

Exceedingly well pleased at the tone and manner in which this was said, as well as at everything else about her, Mrs. Belmont replied, with the greatest good humour, "Oh dear, yes, poor little thing! I told her that

she would be wanted behind the scenes, and I dare say she will be here presently; but I rather suspect that she is giving some last touches of her incessant needle to the dress she is to wear at the little dance we are to have after supper."

Mr. Wilmot strongly suspected on his side that this was, in plain English, a falsehood, and that it was greatly more likely that Mary Bell had been ordered to place herself on one of the farthest seats prepared for the audience, than that she should be employed as described. He was a good deal provoked at this; and remembering one or two recent manœuvrings of the susceptible Miss Fanny, gave her credit for having managed to keep her cousin out of his way. For a moment, he felt a strong inclination to be mischievous, and to declare that he was taken ill, and could not play. But many excellent reasons quickly occurred to prevent his doing any such thing. In the first place, he was really too good-natured; in the next, he felt partly sure that Mary Bell would contrive to see him and his acting,

however well he might be prevented from seeing her; and thirdly, he recovered his good humour and his good spirits at once, by remembering in how short a time he should be able to convince Miss Fanny, without having recourse to any untruth whatever, that the laughed at, scorned, and scouted Butt of the family, was the chosen of his heart, instead of her bright-eyed intriguing self.

The last reflection made him spring across the stage with a bound, and descend in an attitude as light as that of the Bolognese John's Mercury, exactly behind the curtain, when he performed a succession of bows, in testimony of his impatience for its removal.

And it was removed; and a room full of elegantly dressed company was displayed to the actors, and an exquisitely pretty little stage, with a charming group of actors upon it, was made visible to the company. The whole thing went admirably; and Wilmot himself became too animated by the great applause bestowed on his acting, to feel more than a passing movement of vexation at the non-

appearance of Mary Bell. He once more ventured to ask Mrs. Belmont why Miss Bell was not among them; but being told, in reply, that she had preferred being among the audience, he soothed himself with the pleasant conviction, that the preference arose from her wish to see his acting to advantage, and the belief that she was looking at him gave grace and spirit to every word he uttered, and to every movement he made. At length, the curtain was let down for the preparation of the final act of Incubus, and then it was, and then only, that Wilmot remembered the difficulties which had existed about the procuring some one who could enact the demon nightmare. It was a scene in which he had nothing to do, and which seemed to him of such trifling consequence, that any device, however clumsy, might be made to answer the purpose. He did, however, condescend to inquire of Fanny, who was, as usual, standing very near him, in the space left at the end of the back drawing-room, behind the stage, what they had done about the Incubus. "Oh! you shall see.

We have managed it very well—such a glorious pair of horns!"

At this moment, the door of the back drawing-room, which was skilfully left without the side wing, opened, and a slight figure enveloped in a black and flame-coloured mantle, with a hideous head surrounded by a pair of monstrous horns, was led in by Mrs. Belmont. The whole of the dramatic troop, with the exception of Richard, who had already taken his station on the couch, which had been placed on the stage, were assembled in this little green-room, and from one and all burst a shout of suppressed laughter as this ludicrous figure appeared. Though a pair of blazing red eyes glared from the mask, a space had been left through which those of the wearer might look out, and by means of this contrivance, Mary Bell was enabled to see Charles Wilmot's ecstasy of mirth at her appearance, and also that Fanny, overcome by the vehemence of the merry convulsion that had seized on her, had found support on Wilmot's shoulder, on which she rested her arm and her head, apparently

unconscious of what she was about, in the irresistible *fun* of the moment.

The slight figure of Mary Bell trembled, and Mrs. Belmont, who was watching her with all the keenness of a manager's anxiety, instantly seized her arm, and led her on the stage, immediately concealing herself behind the wing, and at the same moment making a signal for the curtain to be drawn up.

Behind all stages constructed as carefully as that of Mrs. Belmont's, ways and means are contrived by which the performers who are not on the stage may, if they choose, watch the proceedings of those who are. By these means nearly every one of the troop were able to watch the proceedings of the Incubus. It made one step forward, and paused.

"Go to him at once!" said the alarmed Mrs. Belmont, in a shrill whisper from behind. But Mary Bell heard her not; she heard only the bursts of laughter from the audience, which greeted her entrance. She saw too the multitude of eyes that were fixed upon her, but yet saw, more plainly still, the head of

Fanny on the shoulder of Wilmot. No idea that Wilmot *knew her not* ever crossed her brain. She had heard him join in the mocking shout that had greeted her, and the united laughter of the whole audience only seemed to her as the echo of his. That one step forward was her last effort of obedience to her aunt; she uttered one long piercing shriek, and fell senseless on the stage. What was there in that awful cry that could recall the gentle accents of Mary Bell? Yet the moment it reached his ears, Wilmot felt certain that it was she who had uttered it. In an instant he was bending over her on the stage, and in the next he had clasped her in his arms, and was bearing her from it. Mrs. Belmont ordered the curtain to drop, and the puzzled audience were left to make out the charade as they might. Doubts, guesses, conjectures of all sorts occupied the company before the curtain; rage, disappointment, and dismay were in full action behind it. When the envelopments of the hapless Mary Bell were removed, she was found to be perfectly senseless, and from her

ghastly aspect, might have been accounted dead, had not the voice of the distracted and repentant Wilmot, who held her in his arms, with a hand pressed upon her still fluttering heart, exclaimed, "She lives—send for assistance!" Yet even then, while the sweet faded flower lay thus low before them, the idea of their entertainment, and of the splendid party assembled to witness it, was predominant in the thoughts of the whole Belmont race.

"What an absurd excess of shyness and self-love!" was Mrs. Belmont's first exclamation on seeing her niece brought back insensible. "Throw a glass of water in her face!" was the second; and then, without paying any further attention to her, she entered, in an agony of agitation and alarm into a discussion with her sons and daughters, as to the best mode of passing over this most provoking hitch in the performance. The readiness with which this was done, might have added to their theatrical laurels, had not all their remedial measures been rendered abortive by the disappearance of Wilmot. While the whole of

the Belmont family were engaged, body and soul, in endeavouring to patch the broken scene, Wilmot had borne Mary Bell out of the room, and with the assistance of one of the servants, had laid her on her little attic bed. A bribe, liberally administered, despatched another servant to summon a neighbouring apothecary, and in a few moments the miserable young man saw the eyes open, upon whose soft glances he had been living in secret with such luxury of love and hope.

And how did they greet him now? Did he meet that look which had so often told his heart he was beloved, even though his lips had resolutely abstained from asking the avowal? Alas! He met only the unmeaning stare of an idiot!

"She is ill, sir,—she is very ill!" he exclaimed, addressing the apothecary. "Animation is restored, but she is not in her senses."

"We must have patience, sir," was the reply.

* * * * *

For months, and months, and months, poor

Wilmot struggled to have patience—and the wretched father, too, returned to claim his one only treasure. He strove to wait with patience also: but it was all in vain. The spark divine was quenched for ever; and though Mary Bell lived many years, the mild, gentle light of her angelic spirit never beamed from those downcast eyes again.

THE END.

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